We’re in This Together | Averting the Big Bang
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- Recognition
- Having fun!

If you have any questions or would like additional information about how to get involved with NCURA, please contact Alissa Brower, National Volunteer Coordinator, at browser@ncura.edu or 202-466-3894.

Visit: http://collaborate.ncura.edu/VolunteerOpportunities

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On the Cover

Tolstoy (1886) said, “The vocation of every man and woman is to serve other people.” That mirrors our topic for this issue; and, as you will see from our offerings, research administrators truly believe in our helping role.

Some articles discuss service to our faculty and institutions: Southwick discusses the importance of working directly with faculty in the PUI community; Burns presents the team approach and bringing in the faculty for compliance training; Smelser and Campo suggest that acting more like PIs may enable us to better serve them; and Castro presents ways in which research administrators can go “above and beyond” to facilitate research. Ty M. Neffert provides a humorous look at what can happen when we lose our service focus.

Some articles address how other institutions and organizations help research administrators and our institutions: Two articles are from APLU and AAU, whose purpose is to be our advocates. Schumaker reveals the various ways in which eRA Commons helps us, and Blum addresses the federal government’s attempts to aid grantees through efforts to streamline the circulars. Lerner points out how federal auditors help us, and Carfora’s interview with Annika Glauner provides insight on the international research scene and the symbiotic relationship between EU Grants Access and NCURA.

A few articles focus on helping ourselves: Dressler, Mulfinger, and Page suggest a plan to avoid the “big bang” (i.e., error) when submitting large proposals; Gannon talks about mitigating large proposals; and Rubens provide suggestions for improving efficiency in the award setup process; and Bogdanski offers real-world advice for facilitating the subaward process. Walker shares results of some recent studies related to stress in the workplace and suggests ways to relief that stress.

President Pat Hawk fills us in on NCURA happenings and plans for better serving our members. Shaklee reports on the Global Research Funding forum, recently held at the University of North Texas.

As you can see, we have tried to cover the gamut of service issues and hope that you enjoy this issue of NCURA Magazine!

Debbie Smith

Reference:

By the time you read this article, we will have already completed our first Board of Directors meeting of the year and our first “back to back” Financial Research Administration and Pre-Award Research Administration conferences. Let me tell you a little bit about both.

The Board of Directors met in early February. We started out talking about all of the things we’ll be working on this year at NCURA. Let me share some of those with you.

We began talking about all of the projects in which NCURA is involved this year.

The first such project is NCURA’s Education Fund. In 2011, NCURA received a gift designated for the creation of an Education Fund. The Fund will provide financial assistance and support for continuing education needs for Research Administrators. Examples of such educational opportunities in NCURA are the travelling workshops, national conferences/workshops and participation in the Grate Certificate and Master’s programs in research administration. A Task Force has been established and will be led by Pam Whitlock, past president of NCURA and emeritus member. Other members of the Task Force include past presidents, the initial donors, our Treasurer, Board members and our Executive Director. One of our first fund-raising opportunities will be inclusion of a place on your dues renewal form that will allow you to contribute to this Fund.

The publication “Sponsored Research Administration: A Guide to Effective Strategies and Recommended Practices” is now under NCURA’s oversight. NCURA partnered with Atlantic Information Services several years ago to create this publication. The Professional Development Committee will be working hard this year to review all of the chapters to determine what needs to be updated; new authors will likely be needed in order to update this publication. It is our hope that the publication will become a little more streamlined and useful.

Progress continues on the planning for the INORMS 2014 conference under the leadership of Dave Richardson and Kathleen Larmett. INORMS is a consortium of International Network of Research Management Societies, and while each member society has its own distinct organization, this group convenes a conference every two years. The meeting will be held at the Washington Hilton on April 10-13, 2014. INORMS 2014 represents the first time this conference has been held in North America, and NCURA partners with both the Canadian Association of University Research Administrators (CAURA) and the Society of Research Administrators International (SRA). Stay tuned for more information further along in the year.

Expect to see some information in upcoming Magazine pieces on volunteer pathways. One of the task forces Dan Nordquist convened as President dealt with volunteer pathways. These pieces will provide all of us insight on how to “get started” in NCURA, at both the regional and national level. Dan has some great plans, and I hope you’ll find these pieces entertaining and informative.

We spent a good amount of time talking about NCURA’s strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and challenges (a much gentler word than “threat”). One of NCURA’s greatest strengths is the consistency and stability of our National Organization staff. I don’t think we can thank them enough for all the time they spend supporting us. Another of our greatest strengths is that we are a “community of colleagues” that readily share knowledge with each other. We have some outstanding opportunities with our YouTube Tuesdays and Collaborate. We do have a continual challenge of creating the next generation of leaders, so please pay attention to these volunteer pathways!

Our first back-to-back Financial Research Administration Conference and Pre-Award Research Administration Conference: As we go to press with this issue of the Magazine, final registration numbers won’t be available. However, I can tell you that the PRA Conference has already set an attendance record; the FRA Conference is on track to break its attendance record as well. I hope to see you there, but we’ll hardly have time to take a walk down to Central Grocery for a Muffeletta Sandwich before the program is released for AM55. You’ll read more about that meeting in this Magazine as well. I know it will be a fantastic meeting, so feel free to join me there too!

Last—but not least—is one more set of important events. In between FRA/PRA and the Annual Meeting, your regional meetings will take place. I wish I could attend each meeting, but scheduling won’t allow me to do that. If I am not at our regional meeting, either Dan Nordquist or Vivian Holmes will be in attendance. I know I speak for both Dan and Vivian in saying that we are excited to join you at your spring regional meetings.

Patricia Hawk is the NCURA President and serves as the Director of Sponsored Programs at Oregon State University. She can be reached at Patricia.Hawk@oregonstate.edu
It’s here! The Reform of Federal Policies Relating to Grants and Cooperative Agreements; Cost Principles and Administrative Requirements (including Single Audit Act) was proposed by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) on February 1, 2013, in the Federal Register, and stakeholders—all recipients of financial assistance—have until May 2, 2013, to offer comment on the proposed reforms.

As anticipated, the reforms propose combining OMB Circulars A–21, A–87, A–110, and A–122 (which have been placed in 2 CFR Parts 220, 225, 215, and 230); Circulars A–89, A–102, and A–133; the Guidance in Circular A–50 on Single Audit Act follow-up; and pending further review, the Cost Principles for Hospitals at 45 CFR Part 74, Appendix E. Makes one almost breathless! And, as OMB outlines in the Federal Register notice, the combined circular is intended to make us more efficient because OMB believes that “eliminating unnecessary requirements for financial assistance will allow recipients of Federal awards to re-orient efforts spent on compliance with complex requirements towards achievement of programmatic objectives.”

I’m on board!

Over the next few months, research institutions and the associations representing those institutions will be combing through the combined circulars looking for what most refer to as “unintended consequences” of the proposed reforms. State, local, and tribal governments, non-profit entities—everybody is going to be reviewing the documents prepared by OMB asking the same questions: Have they “done no harm?” Are there additional opportunities for change (when first proposed, the focus was on the costing circulars; does bringing the administrative requirements into the mix open additional opportunities to advocate for changes)? And is this really an effective streamlining effort? OMB has prepared a series of documents, available on its website, that enables the interested party to compare current guidance, requirements, etc., with the proposed “uniform guidance.”

The next steps will be managed by OMB through the interagency Council on Financial Assistance Reform (COFAR). As described in earlier Capital Views, COFAR replaces the old Grants Policy Council and Grants Executive Board and includes in its permanent membership representatives from OMB’s Office of Federal Financial Management and the eight largest grantmaking agencies: the Departments of Health and Human Services, Agriculture, Education, Energy, Homeland Security, Housing and Urban Development, Labor, and Transportation, as well as one additional rotating member to represent the perspectives of other agencies, which for the first two-year term is the National Science Foundation. Not necessarily the list of grant makers that the higher education community would choose for permanent members but reflective of the agencies that provide the largest amounts of funds as grants and cooperative agreements. To COFAR is assigned the task of culling through the comments and advising OMB on the next steps.

In its initial reactions, the research organization community sees some positive changes (or non-changes). Many of the questions of greatest interest for the research community lie in the cost principles and requirements. Among the most notorious changes OMB proposed in the Advanced Notice of Proposed Guidance in February, 2012, was moving toward mandatory discounted or voluntary flat indirect (facilities and administration, F&A) cost rates instead of negotiated rates. The new proposed guidance does not include a flat rate, but OMB is still tinkering with the F&A. It proposes two additional reforms by offering institutions the option to extend their negotiated rates for up to four years, subject to approval by their cognizant federal agency and assuming there had been no major changes in their indirect costs. OMB sets a minimum flat rate of 10% of modified total direct costs for entities without the capacity for a full negotiation while they develop capacity. With regard to F&A, a significant requirement that appears in the section concerning Subrecipients is the explicit requirement for pass-through entities to pay the negotiated F&A rates.

As to the anticipated changes to the requirements for payroll certification—or effort reporting, OMB has eliminated the examples that have been a part of OMB Circular A-21 Section J10.c in an effort to support a broader array of approaches for how a recipient can validate payroll costs without limiting the systems used by the community—we’ll be interested to hear how the audit community responds to this initiative. As to direct charging administrative and clerical support—OMB has incorporated into the guidance the
principle that all work that is directly allocable to one award may be charged to that award, regardless of the type of task. In response to calls for the expansion of the 1.3% utility cost adjustment, OMB offers two alternative approaches: the first allows any institution of higher education to meter their utility usage at the sub-building level instead of by building; or, as a second alternative when metering utility usage by function is not feasible, entities may add a multiplier to their square footage used for research to calculate “effective” square footage for purposes of utility cost calculation.

There are other useful changes to administrative requirements. For example, agencies would be required to post funding announcements for at least 30 days in grants.gov and the CFFA — nope, that’s not a typo, OMB proposes using the Catalog of Federal Financial Assistance as the home for announcements. OMB has brought the standard format for funding announcements that was established in the OMB Memorandum M–04–01 of October 15, 2003, into the proposed circular to consolidate all applicable guidance for grants into one place — not a bad idea. OMB emphasizes the importance of compliance with the Paperwork Reduction Act of 1995 (PRA) and vows to ensure that all information collections – whether in paper or electronically – meet the standards set by the PRA.

There’s a lot more. Should you respond? Absolutely. You can contact your Washington-based association and offer them your comments, suggestions and, if appropriate, assistance in building an association-level response. You can send a letter supporting your association’s efforts highlighting areas that will have direct impact on how you do business. You can comb through the entire document, compare it to current circulars and guidance, and craft a response from your institution. All 200+ pages of it (the cross-walks prepared by OMB are useful). If sequestration occurs, you just might have the time!

Here are the links:

Notice of Proposed Guidance in Federal Register (Summary and Description of Changes) FULL TEXT Proposed OMB Uniform Guidance for Federal Financial Assistance
http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=OMB-2013-0001-0002

Note to reviewers: This is the full text of OMB’s proposed guidance for grants.

The following documents are intended as supporting materials to facilitate review of the Proposed OMB Uniform Guidance for Federal Financial Assistance

Crosswalk from existing to proposed guidance
http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=OMB-2013-0001-0004

Crosswalk from proposed guidance to predominant source in existing guidance
http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=OMB-2013-0001-0004

Administrative Requirements Text Comparison
http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=OMB-2013-0001-0005

Cost Principles Text Comparison
http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=OMB-2013-0001-0006

Audit Requirements Text Comparison
http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=OMB-2013-0001-0007

Definitions Text Comparison
http://www.regulations.gov/#!documentDetail;D=OMB-2013-0001-0008

Other References:


Carol J. Blum is Director for Research Compliance and Administration at the Council on Governmental Relations (COGR). Before joining COGR in 2001, Carol served Ohio University for ten years as associate vice president for research after three years at the Ohio Board of Regents as director of graduate and special programs. She holds a PhD in history from the University of Cincinnati. She has recently begun exercising the right side of her brain in art classes and continues to volunteer at the Washington Literacy Council and Washington Area (Reproductive Health) Clinic Defense Task Force. Carol can be reached at cblum@cogr.edu
Sustaining Research Budgets in a Difficult Fiscal Environment

The nation’s fiscal challenges that dominated the election continue to hold the stage in 2013. We have known since the Super Committee failed in November 2011 that we would be approaching the fiscal cliff and that we would face deep discretionary spending cuts — known as the sequester — as 2012 came to an end. What we did not foresee then was the real potential that sequestration would actually become a viable option for policymakers to pursue.

Sequestration and its threat of significant cuts to research funding has been our first, though not only, concern in the fiscal debate. Here are two examples of how AAU has sought to play a leadership role on budget issues. First, teaming with the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU), we marshaled over 150 university Presidents to sign a letter advocating a balanced, long-term budget agreement that focuses on entitlements and revenues and prevents further cuts to nondefense discretionary spending. Second, we worked with APLU and The Science Coalition to repurpose our ScienceWorksforU.S. website – which we had used originally to show the research benefits of stimulus funding – to identify the potentially devastating impacts of the sequester on university research. The site includes not only videos, editorial cartoons, op-eds, and articles, but also data on the potential impacts on universities in all 50 states.

Fighting for Appropriate Reimbursement of Facilities and Administrative Costs

With respect to research costs, for the past two years we have been actively engaged in discussions with the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the federal agencies as they have considered modifications to several grant circulars, including Circular A-21. OMB recently issued proposed guidance that consolidates several grant circulars, including Circulars A-21, A-87, A-110 and A-133.

The proposed guidance addresses several issues which have been raised by AAU and the research university community in an effort to reduce costs, improve efficiency, and ensure appropriate reimbursement. These issues include exploring alternatives to time and effort reporting, revising reimbursements to higher education institutions for utility costs, allowing grantees to direct charge certain administrative support and computer costs, and addressing agency exceptions to the use of negotiated cost rates.

Earlier in the process, despite the extensive comments AAU provided, OMB’s first Advanced Notice
of Proposed Guidance (ANPG), issued on February 28, 2012, included controversial changes, such as moving to mandatory discounted or voluntary flat facilities and administrative (F&A) cost rates instead of negotiated rates. We strongly opposed this idea. The new proposal does not contemplate a flat rate. However, it would give institutions the option to extend their negotiated rates for up to four years, subject to approval by their cognizant federal agency.

AAU is working with APLU and the Council on Governmental Relations (COGR) to develop a detailed analysis of the OMB proposed guidance. Based upon our analysis, we will work through our Task Force on Strengthening the Government-University Partnership, co-chaired by Chancellor Gene Block of UCLA and President James Wagner of Emory, to provide comments to OMB on its proposal. As we have done previously, we will coordinate our comments closely with COGR and APLU. We are hopeful that we can have a positive impact on the final OMB guidance.

Reducing Federal Regulations on Research and Higher Education

On the broader front of federal regulations, the Administration and Congress have both prioritized reforming regulations and reducing compliance burdens on business. AAU has been working to make sure that research universities’ regulatory concerns relating to research and education are also addressed. We have stressed to Members of Congress and key Administration officials the costs associated with the increasing number of regulations with which we must comply. We have pointed out that unlike other federal grantees and contractors, our universities end up shouldering a great deal of these compliance costs due to the 26-percent cap imposed by OMB on reimbursement of universities’ administrative costs.

We have led efforts to confront other regulatory challenges facing research universities, taking on issues relating to effort reporting, human subjects protection in research, export controls, and conflict of interest regulations. AAU has been at the table and working hard on your behalf to make clear the pitfalls of misguided and uninformed federal actions and seek outcomes that address legitimate public concerns, while ensuring that U.S. research universities remain the world’s best.

One specific regulatory matter on which I am pleased to say we had a positive influence this past year was the treatment of satellites for purposes of export controls. We wrote to Congress and succeeded in getting language included in the final National Defense Authorization Act that will greatly help space scientists on our campuses whose research has been hampered by the current export control restrictions on research satellites under the International Traffic in Arms Regulations (ITAR).

Another area on which we have focused is financial conflict of interest. While we understand the clear need to manage conflicts of interest carefully, the public and policymakers often forget that potential conflicts are inevitable if we are to increase the necessary public-private partnerships that facilitate taking ideas from our labs to the marketplace for broader societal benefit. To help explain the importance and nature of university-industry relationships, AAU has been working with the National Academies’ University-Industry Demonstration Partnership (UIDP) on a project called “Principled Partnerships.” The focus of this effort is to point out that while we must protect against conflicts of interest that bias research results, and which might even put the public health at risk, we must also foster an environment that promotes and encourages sensible and sound university-industry collaborations that are in the public interest.

This year we will continue to respond to regulatory changes proposed by federal agencies. Additionally, we will devise strategies and seek opportunities to reduce the burden of specific regulations and rules, working particularly on advancing regulatory reform recommendations contained in a joint AAU-APLU-COGR white paper submitted to the National Research Council (NRC) and contained in its report on research universities. AAU also will engage the Government Accountability Office team tasked last year by former House Science and Technology Research Subcommittee Chairman Mo Brooks (R-AL) to review the impact of federal research regulations on the conduct of research and to report on which federal regulations create unreasonable and costly burdens for research universities. In addition, we will engage with the NRC, the National Science Board, and other relevant organizations as they also examine the impact of various federal regulations and reporting requirements on colleges and universities.

Helping to Realize Recommendations Contained in the National Research Council’s Report on the U.S. Research Universities

During the past year significant reports emerged that generally validated our concerns and supported our perspective on many of these issues. The most important was Research Universities and the Future of America, a landmark report issued by the NRC. Offering ten breakthrough actions vital to our nation’s prosperity and security, the report drew attention to both funding and regulatory issues, to the plight of our nation’s public flagship universities, and to public concerns about the cost of higher education.

The NRC report is an indirect result of AAU action, having emerged from a suggestion made by my predecessor, Robert Berdahl, to Senator Lamar Alexander (R-TN) that he ask the NRC to prepare such a report. Since it was released in July, AAU and many of our institutions have worked with the NRC and the committee that wrote the report, including its chair, former DuPont CEO Chad Holliday, to gain traction for the report’s recommendations. We are participating in a number of the meetings that the NRC is scheduling to spur university-business collaboration in regions around the country, and are advocating for recommendations that require congressional or administrative action in Washington.

Conclusion

For higher education, and perhaps particularly for research universities, the past year has been challenging with respect to both the funding and non-funding aspects of the university-government partnership. This year may well be even more difficult. AAU will continue to work to fend off major budget cuts to research. At the same time we will continue to work with Congress and the Administration to address major issues relating to research costs, the overall burden of regulation, and specific regulatory and reporting requirements that directly affect NCURA members.

Hunter R. Rawlings III became president of the Association of American Universities on June 1, 2011. Prior to this position, Rawlings served as president of Cornell University from 1995 to 2003, and as interim president for one year between 2005 and 2006. He served as president of the University of Iowa from 1988 to 1995. At the conclusion of his presidency in 2003, Rawlings was elected president emeritus and began serving as a full-time professor in Cornell’s Departments of Classics and History. Prior to the University of Iowa, Rawlings spent 18 years at the University of Colorado at Boulder, where he was a faculty member, chairman of the Classics Department, associate vice chancellor for instruction, and then vice president for academic affairs for the University of Colorado system.
Operating in the ever-changing world of higher education can be difficult for institutions under any circumstances. With the nation’s political makeup causing a great deal of uncertainty across all sectors of the economy, including education, research and development, the challenges for universities and their leadership are greater than ever before.

That’s why the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU) is here to help. Based in Washington, DC, we’ve assembled an extraordinary team of higher education professionals—former University Presidents, Deans and Provosts; researchers, policy experts, congressional staff and administrators, who understand Washington and how to make it work for our member institutions.

With roots going back to 1887, APLU (formerly NASULGC) is a research, action and advocacy organization of 218 public research universities, land-grant institutions, state university systems and related organizations. As the nation’s oldest higher education association, we are dedicated to excellence in learning, discovery and engagement. Through a combination of public policy initiatives, research reports with cutting-edge ideas on how to improve higher education, and the establishment and growth of an array of networks and partnerships, APLU utilizes the collective power of public research universities to advance the community’s goals.

You might already know about APLU through your Vice President/Chancellor for Research and their participation in the APLU Council on Research Policy and Graduate Education (CRPGE). Or perhaps you know of our Commission on Innovation, Competitiveness, and Economic Prosperity (CICEP) as you or your colleagues have participated in the development of metrics and tools to benchmark university contributions to regional economic development. Then, of course, there is our proud heritage in advocating for research and education programs in food, agriculture and natural resources through our Board on Agriculture Assembly and other affiliated groups, including the Council for Agricultural Research, Extension, and Teaching (CARET). But these important groups are only part of what we do.

APLU is one of six higher education associations that is presidentially based. Most of our Board of Directors and our entire Executive Committee are Presidents or Chancellors of our public research universities and provide guidance on our direction and add strength to our advocacy efforts. Throughout the year, we regularly convene councils of Presidents, Provosts, Research Vice Presidents, and many others to serve as their professional networks as well as clearly understand the needs of our member institutions and shape our national agenda. Our Council on Governmental Affairs (CGA) is comprised of federal government relations officials representing their member universities in every state.

We work closely with other higher education groups, science societies and coalitions, including industry, on a range of issues important to universities, including federally funded research, student financial aid, immigration reform, and much more. For research issues, our closest collaborators tend to be the Association of American Universities (AAU) whose public members are all also part of APLU, and the Council on Government Relations (COGR), whose research administrators come mostly from APLU institutions.

Reflecting our deep concern about the future competitiveness of public research universities, we have long been engaged in advocating for annual federal funding of research and education, and fighting for a balanced resolution to federal fiscal problems, including warning against sequestration. Reforming government cost policies under OMB Circular A-21 has been a high priority during the past several years to rebalance the federal–university sharing of costs for research and lower the regulatory burden on universities and faculty. For many years, we have worked closely with the National Academies’ National Research Council (NRC) in its efforts to assess research universities.

To help inform last year’s NRC report, Research Universities and the Future of America, we convened five regional meetings to ensure challenges to public university research efforts were clearly stated and included in the national discussion.

Last year, leaders in CRPGE, working with colleagues in other organizations, prompted key lawmakers to hold a hearing on the future of research universities. Three APLU senior research officers testified and helped stimulate a congressional request for a Government Accountability Office (GAO) review of federal regulatory burdens on universities. More recently, we worked with AAU and The Science Coalition to establish the Golden Goose Awards to recognize scientists and engineers whose federally funded research has had significant human and economic benefits.
Research is but a part of our higher education mission. For the better part of the past two decades, U.S. public higher education has been beset by declining state appropriations, rising costs, growing enrollments, changes in student demographics, increasing tuition, new competitors, and more. We have placed increased emphasis on assisting universities with these major adjustments by introducing new programs and research efforts as well as publicly advocating on behalf of member universities.

We recently launched Project Degree Completion in collaboration the American Association of State Colleges and Universities (AASCU), which involved securing pledges from nearly 500 four-year public colleges and universities to collectively boost completion rates by 3.8 million bachelor’s degrees by 2025. This effort would contribute greatly to the national goal of having 60 percent of American adults with a college degree. We are also working to develop new student accountability measures that can better track a student’s progress and ensure universities are not being unfairly evaluated for giving disadvantaged students opportunities to succeed. To help expand access and improve the quality of student learning, APLU is leading an effort to form an institutional consortium to accelerate the development and use of technology that personalizes a student’s learning experience. By making it possible to gather data on learning for large numbers of students, technology will open up important new avenues for doing research on learning, with immediate and significant benefits.

APLU, in conjunction with the Coalition of Urban Serving Universities (USU), launched the USU/APLU Office of Urban Initiatives in 2011 to leverage the intellectual capital and economic power of urban universities to improve urban life and America’s competitiveness in the global economy. Last year, our Urban Initiatives office launched UUHealth to focus on health equity through health workforce innovations in a partnership with the Association of American Medical Colleges (AAMC) funded by a $4.5 million cooperative agreement from the National Institutes of Health.

Of course, a challenge we share with all our members is communicating our impact on the nation externally. In order to tell the public university success story nationally and provide a platform for member campuses to tell their story regionally, APLU’s Council on Strategic Communications and Advancement and CICEP are working together to develop a website that defines the value, reach and innovation provided by public universities.

And there is much, much more underway at APLU; promoting college success by minority males in STEM; working with Hispanic Serving Institutions; formulating university-based energy initiatives and identifying national energy priorities; helping institutions with energy sustainability; forming university consortia to work on mining issues; preparing science and mathematics teachers; not to mention our significant work on international development and education.

I am proud to help lead an organization as effective as APLU and encourage you to visit us at www.aplu.org to learn more about our work and how you and your institution can become more involved.

Peter McPherson is president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU). Peter was president of Michigan State University from 1993 to 2004. He is the former Chair of the Board of Dow Jones & Company and has held senior positions in the federal government and the private sector. He can be reached at president@aplu.org.

Question of the ISSUE

How is “We’re Here to Help” implemented in your research administration offices?”

We try to teach people to say. “Let me get back to you... I can’t do it that way. This is why... But we could do it this way instead...”

We also have a couple of people who are Research Administration Consultants who fill in for short term absences and work with departments to take on overload and special intense projects.

Karen Woodward Massey

Ditto what Karen said. We strive for a “getting to yes” approach. The PI’s Plan A may not be allowed but we’ll do our best to find a (legal) way to get her what she needs.

Suzanne M. Rivera

I strive for meeting each and every person where they are at. Listen more and say less. It is important to focus more on systems of support rather than systems of authoritative control.

Kris Batista Monahan

Editor’s Note: The Question of the Issue is posted on the NCURA Facebook Page and Tweeted, so everyone look for it. Erica’s comment is a reply from Tony’s FB post. Gotta love Social Media!

Peter McPherson is president of the Association of Public and Land-grant Universities (APLU). Peter was president of Michigan State University from 1993 to 2004. He is the former Chair of the Board of Dow Jones & Company and has held senior positions in the federal government and the private sector. He can be reached at president@aplu.org.

MARCH/APRIL 2013
Let’s assume you have finished your weekly grocery shopping and are making your way to the front of the store to pay. As you evaluate whether to enter lane #2 or #4, one factor for consideration may be the number of individuals in line ahead of you. Lane #2 may have two people, each with only a few items to purchase, while Lane #4 only has one person, but with an overflowing shopping cart. Which lane do you go to? Don’t look now, but you are benchmarking. You are using available data — the number of customers with items in front of you and your past experience with visiting the store — to make a management decision, i.e., do I go left or right?

Benchmarking is assessing a measurement against a point of reference. It is the process of comparing one’s processes and performance metrics to industry standards or best practices and evaluating the results. Benchmarking can be an internal analysis of your institution or an external review of peer institutions, or both. Internal and external benchmarking have distinct and complementary benefits. Internal benchmarking provides a good method for calibrating performance within the parameters of a common system, while external benchmarking provides insight into how performance may differ from peers.
In the grocery store example, you made a decision about the fastest line based on an internal comparison of the available options at the store. Perhaps you opted for the slower line so that you would have time to mull over a gum purchase or compare your NCAA basketball bracket to the editor’s picks in a popular sports magazine, but at least you had the information necessary to make an informed decision. You might also make an external comparison that another nearby grocery store is typically less crowded overall, which may influence your future shopping choices.

DEFINING THE PERFORMANCE METRICS

Whether you have identified a targeted area for improvement or sense a general need for improvement, it is beneficial to first map your operational landscape to clearly visualize how processes are related. This will help identify factors that should be improved. For instance, accounts receivable balances may be overly delinquent, but that performance issue may be directly tied to resource allocation issues in another area, such as financial reporting.

To begin, you should create an inventory of key tasks performed by your office and other core responsibilities. In a post-award office, some activities may be based on recurring monthly or annual cycles that adhere to sponsor-driven due dates, like billing, financial reporting, or effort reporting. Other associated tasks that are equally important, but not tied to a specific cycle time, may include providing customer service (help desk support), award set-up, accounts receivable management, expenditure review and approval, budget or overdraft monitoring, etc.

Next, determine what to measure, the reasons for measurement, and the basis for comparison. How will the data be used and how will you establish priorities? Your focus may be based on historic customer service feedback, cost (both dollar value and opportunity costs), risk assessment, audit findings, available resources, etc.

Once you have metrics, you can establish a target goals and service level expectations, which will help promote delivery of consistent and reliable service. This provides a baseline to review past performance, for recurring comparisons with other units, evaluation of key cycle times, and an approach to managing compliance risk.

As an example, if the number of award set-ups were to increase by 25 percent, what would the measurable impact be on the process or the individuals assigned to support the process? Perhaps the influx in award set-up requests uncovers workflow issues that lead to a longer cycle time. Without benchmarking, this may not be uncovered, understood, or worse yet, not proactively managed.

INTERNAL BENCHMARKING

Internal benchmarking requires making comparisons within your institution, either across similar functions or for a single unit over a period of time. These comparisons can be useful to establish a reasonable norm under existing operations. For instance, you may be able to determine that most departments, on average, process grant approvals within a two-day period. Depending on its reasonableness, this two-day measurement might then set the standard for performance goals and expectations across all departments. In the case of a post-award office, there is no other “like-unit” at your institution. The only valid comparison is a snapshot of the same office from a week, month, or a year ago.

Internal benchmarking is the best way to compare performance across a standard baseline for institutional operations. Comparisons within an institution allow for perspective under a common set of policy constraints, level of centralization, degree of risk tolerance and overall research culture. To understand the baseline, it is helpful to first see the picture without variations.

Another benefit of internal benchmarking is that the metric definition and measurement techniques can be institutionally driven. When examining your own operations, you have the ability to define what metrics should be and how they will be collected. The only limits are the time and resources required to collect the data.

A few common examples of metrics gathered for internal benchmarking purposes are below:

**Volume and Productivity**
- Number of proposals
- Number of active awards
- Anticipated billing
- Actual billing
- Number of financial reports
- A/R by date range (30, 60, 90, 120, etc)
- A/R by sponsor
- A/R by department or PI

**Cycle Times**
- Average number of days to review and submit a proposal.
- Average number of days to issue a subaward.
- Average number of days to set-up an award in the system.
- Average number of days to complete billing/invoicing requirements.

**Compliance Considerations**
- Number of financial reports submitted late
- Number of late cost transfers
- Number of late effort reports
EXTERNAL BENCHMARKING

Many institutions are striving for “best practices,” but may not have taken time to define what that means. Some might describe “best practices” as finding the desired balance between operational costs, financial and compliance risk, high quality customer support, and streamlined and efficient work products. Others might focus more heavily on processing time or maximizing resources.

External benchmarking is a structured process of identifying those “best practices” by comparing one organization’s operations and performance metrics to that of other institutions. Whereas, internal benchmarking is useful to better understand relative performance within your current structure, external benchmarking can provide insight on how improved performance is achieved in a differently structured system. Internal benchmarking is the first step to establish your baseline of improvement opportunities; external benchmarking is the calibration step to identify best practice possibilities.

A key point to remember is that what works for one institution may not automatically work for another, but using metrics to compare performance can help to identify the areas where the potential for greatest improvement exists. Benchmarking allows an institution to understand what is attainable.

When making external comparisons, the good news is that many of the core processes of research administration are largely consistent; while responsibilities and workflow may vary slightly, most institutions have processes in place for proposal submission, award set-up, financial reporting, award closeout, etc. Each of those processes have the same basic steps. For example, proposal submission almost always involves reviewing a proposal for RFP requirements, reviewing a budget for institutional consistency, verifying COI disclosures and routing a proposal for some level of institutional approval and sign off.

CHOOSE YOUR PEERS WISELY

Choosing the right institutions for comparison is an essential component of external benchmarking. As a rule, benchmarking should reveal the differences and opportunities in processes not reflect the differences in the type of institution. For instance, say you wanted to understand what staffing is optimal for a post award office. For that analysis, an institution with $10 million in annual research awards would not compare favorably to an institution with $300 million in annual research awards. The infrastructure needs and varied economies of scale introduce too many differences to make a fair comparison.

In addition to research volume, a few of the other key factors for consideration when defining an appropriate peer class include similar research portfolios, schools or colleges within a university, institution type (public, private, research foundation, hospital, university), system affiliation, and geographical region. Although it is not necessary or likely even possible to align all of these factors, the goal should be to choose the closest comparison. Also consider identifying aspirational peers to find areas where enhancement opportunities exist, which will help establish management goals for your institution.

OBTAINING VALUE FROM BENCHMARKS

After you have chosen your metrics, selected your peers and collected the benchmarking data, it is important to perform additional due diligence. Understanding the underlying causes for variances in your data is truly the key to discovering best practices. For example, a peer institution may process contracts in an average of 30 days, whereas your institution might require three months. Before you impose that standard on your office, you should seek answers to a few follow-up questions, such as:

1) Are the start and end points of the peer process the same as mine? Do we conduct the process in the same manner?

2) Does this peer require fewer approval steps in its review?

3) How many contract administrators does the peer’s office employ?

Based on the answers to these questions, the required action could be as simple as adjusting your benchmarking metrics or as complex as realigning your resources and processes. Benchmarking data raises the question, but should only be the starting point for discussion.

GET INTO THE GAME

Internal and external benchmarking, by way of cross-unit comparisons, reviewing against historic averages, and evaluating performance against peers, helps to insure institutions are well equipped to set attainable performance goals and proactively manage portfolios and make important management decisions to attain these goals. Rather than guess or hope, institutions are able to use fact based data and metrics to set goals, establish service level expectations, and calibrate desired performance.

Those analytical skills you have been practicing at the grocery store can now be put to good use, provided you are able to find an appropriate balance between the value gained by having data available to make and support management decisions and the cost of gathering the data in the first place. By paying close attention to the areas you wish to focus on and by prioritizing your efforts, you will find yourself off the bench and in the game. Good luck!

Tim Patterson is a Senior Director in the Higher Education and Life Sciences practice at Huron Consulting Group. Tim has close to 18 years of experience working in areas such as university operations and research administration with an emphasis on grant and contract administration, compliance with cost accounting standards, operational improvement, training development, and audit resolution. He has presented a number of regional and national NCURA conferences. Tim can be reached at tpatterson@huronconsultinggroup.com.

Zach Belton is a Director in the Higher Education and Life Sciences practice at Huron Consulting Group. Zach has dedicated over 12 years to assisting clients better understand their research enterprises through assessment, metrics and benchmarking. He is also a frequent presenter at regional and national NCURA conferences. Zach can be reached at zbelton@huronconsultinggroup.com.

Marisa Zuskar, a Manager in Huron’s Higher Education practice, has spent the majority of her career focusing on operational and performance improvement at research institutions. She has designed operational, performance, and compliance management metrics and reports allowing institutional leadership to monitor operations. She has extensive experience using metrics to identify opportunities to increase the efficiency and effectiveness of sponsored projects administration. Marisa can be reached at mzuskar@huronconsultinggroup.com.
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When I was asked to contribute an article to this Magazine on the theme “We’re here to help,” I jumped at the opportunity. Some may laugh (or cry!) at the idea of government employees rendering aid, but I think the theme perfectly characterizes the attitude with which my office, the National Science Foundation (NSF) Office of Inspector General (OIG), carries out its mission. And I think the fact that both research administrators and OIG auditors and investigators take a similar approach to their work illustrates why our two communities work so well together.

So how do we at NSF OIG help the scientific community? The public’s confidence in federally funded scientific research is undermined when funds made available for such research are misused. Consistent with our dual mission to prevent and detect fraud, waste and abuse, and to promote economy and efficiency in NSF’s programs and operations, auditors and investigators from NSF OIG work diligently to identify situations where federal funds have been used inappropriately and to recover such funds when necessary. Similarly, fabrication, falsification and plagiarism in federally funded research erode the public’s trust in science. Our investigators are committed to doing what they can to ensure the responsible conduct of research and to vigorously investigating allegations of research misconduct in NSF-funded awards.

Our new approach enables us to see more clearly how awardees are using funds when some new approaches we at NSF OIG are using to fulfill our mission.

Automated Audit Techniques Enhance Oversight

On the audit front, we are expanding our use of automated techniques to enhance our oversight capacity. NSF makes 13,000 awards annually to more than 2,200 institutions. Since the Foundation accomplishes its mission primarily through grants to individual researchers and institutions, robust oversight of grants management is essential for proper accountability over federal tax dollars intended to advance progress in science. Engaging in such oversight can be a challenging proposition: there is less information available about expenditures under grants than contracts because grant recipients usually request payments as an aggregate dollar amount and grant recipients, unlike contractors, do not have to present supporting documentation such as invoices and receipts to receive payment from the agency.

Our new approach enables us to see more clearly how awardees are using funds and to enhance our oversight capacity by obtaining, comparing and analyzing data from multiple databases to identify anomalies in cost data and in award-expenditure patterns. Some examples of the data sources we use are listed below:

- Internal to NSF – funding payments, proposal budgets and panel scores
- External to NSF – the System for Award Management (formerly known as the excluded parties list system or EPLS), Dun and Bradstreet Risk Scores, and Single Audit Report data
- Recipient financial system records –General and subsidiary ledger data, time and attendance data, and travel/purchase card data

Applying automated techniques against the information from these data sources provides us with
greater insight on risk and expands our capacity for oversight at each phase in the life cycle of a grant – pre-award, active award, and award/closure. With this new approach we can:

- Improve our ability to identify high-risk awardees
- Focus our limited audit resources on questionable expenditures
- Increase oversight from a random sample of transactions for a few awards to 100 percent coverage of all transactions for all awards
- Conduct continuous monitoring in real time to expose problems sooner and prevent misuse

- It is important to understand that these automated techniques are a starting point, not an end point, and that they complement but do not replace traditional audit techniques. Accordingly, our audit work still includes:
  - Interviews
  - Requests for support for specific transactions
  - Discussions to request additional material

To illustrate how these techniques work, our first audit using this new approach allowed us to look at more than 280,000 transactions posted to 60 NSF awards during our 3-year audit period. In the past we would likely have identified two or three awards and tested only 20-30 randomly selected transactions from each. We used analytics tools to cross check data from the awardee’s financial records and NSF data systems and merged these two databases into a single database we could use for analysis.

Among other things, the auditee’s records told us when equipment was purchased and how much NSF was charged. Data showing grant end dates and whether respective grant budgets included equipment came from NSF databases. With this approach, we were able to quickly identify additional items for testing or new areas in which to perform tests as matters came to our attention during audit work. We were also able to review hundreds of thousands of transactions in a short period of time to identify situations requiring follow-up. Ultimately we identified almost $7 million in questionable transactions using this approach.

Our findings illustrate the value of using these techniques to provide a higher level of accountability over the billions of dollars in NSF awards.

The value of automated techniques like those described above is not limited to OIGs. Agencies and institutions are increasingly using data analytics to undertake more meaningful review and analysis of expenditures.

### Planned Assessments of Responsible Conduct of Research Training

Another area in which we at NSF OIG are undertaking a new effort involves the training universities receiving NSF funds are required to provide in the Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR).

At a time when opinion surveys indicate that an increasing number of Americans are becoming distrustful of science, it is more important than ever that the conduct of scientific research not be tainted by instances of misrepresentation or cheating. Recent studies suggest that 75% of high school students and 50% of college students admit to cheating, and 30% of researchers admit to engaging in questionable research practices. Consistent with these results, OIG has seen a dramatic increase in substantive allegations of plagiarism and data fabrication, especially as it relates to junior faculty members and graduate students. Over the past 10 years, the number of allegations received by our office has more than tripled, as has the number of findings of research misconduct NSF has made based on OIG investigative reports. Affirmative steps are necessary to counter the trends of increasing integrity-related violations. Since NSF funds research in virtually every non-medical research discipline, the agency is in a unique position to lead the government response to addressing these disturbing trends at all levels of education.

Congress passed the America COMPETES Act in 2007 to increase innovation through research and development, and to improve the competitiveness of the United States in the world economy. For NSF, the Act mandates new requirements to advance the professional and ethical development of young scientists, such as mentoring plans for all postdoctoral positions, and plans to provide training on the responsible conduct of research to undergraduates, graduate students, and postdoctoral researchers funded by NSF. NSF responded to the America COMPETES Act by instituting requirements that grantees submit mentoring plans for all NSF-supported “postdocs” and have RCR training plans for NSF-funded students. The NSF guidance as to what these plans should consist of was limited and offered great flexibility to grantee institutions to develop plans tailored to their needs.

Our staff have observed a great deal of variety in grantee RCR programs, which range from high quality mentoring programs to ones that simply refer students to web-based or computer-based training. In addition, information collected from our site visits and investigations suggests that some institutions are not taking these requirements seriously, thereby potentially undermining the public’s confidence in the research enterprise and placing NSF funds at risk. Accordingly, our office is developing a process to examine how awardees have established RCR training programs now that sufficient time has passed for the research community to implement the America COMPETES RCR requirements. We plan to assess institutions’ commitment to the program (including resources) and how expectations for the program are communicated to faculty and students. We also plan to examine, among other things, course structure and content, participation requirements and options, faculty participation, and oversight. We are currently working with the Office of Management and Budget to obtain approval to begin this review in FY 2013.

### We Need You!

I appreciate the chance to describe some of the new activities we at NSF OIG are engaging in as we carry out our mission. Because research administrators and OIG auditors and investigators share a common goal of ensuring the integrity of federally funded science, there are many opportunities for us to work together in the future! In the meantime, we look forward to continued collaborations with you all in the future!

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1 Expenditure transactions included time charges, equipment purchases, cost transfers, travel expenses and purchase card usage.
Since many of our readers might not be familiar with EU GrantsAccess, ETH Zurich, and the University of Zurich, can you tell us more about your work with them?

EU GrantsAccess is the mutual office for International Programs of ETH Zurich and the University of Zurich. It supports and promotes international academic cooperation between scientists and scholars. It informs and supports researchers on European research programs. The office is an active participant in shaping the internationalization strategy of both universities and their associated research centers. As a member of the Swiss Information Network for EU Research Programs, EU GrantsAccess closely collaborates with its partners at national and international levels. ETH Zurich and the University of Zurich are presently involved in over 600 EU projects within the FP7 (the EU’s Seventh Framework Programme for research), including over 160 Marie-Curie-Fellowships and 80 ERC projects (European Research Council). All these projects were negotiated and partly administered by our office.

In addition to the above, EU GrantsAccess is a EURAXESS Service center (http://ec.europa.eu/euraxess/). As such it provides information and assistance to mobile researchers and helps researchers and their family plan and organize their move to a foreign country, and providing assistance in all matters related to mobility. As an information and advice center for young and established international researchers and academics, for more than 10-years EU GrantsAccess has been: (1) working with researchers wishing to come to Switzerland from anywhere in the world; (2) working with Swiss researchers going or planning to go abroad; and working with Swiss researchers and academics returning to Switzerland.

As previously noted, EU GrantsAccess is a mutual office of ETH Zurich and the University of Zurich. Both institutions play a key role in Switzerland’s research landscape. ETH Zurich — more formally known as The Swiss Federal Institute of Technology Zurich — is an institution of the Swiss Confederation dedicated to higher education, learning and research. As a typical technical university, ETH Zurich has a clear focus on engineering, architecture and natural sciences, but also includes the humanities and social sciences, as well as management and economics in distinct departments.

ETH Zurich regularly appears at the top of international rankings as one of the best universities in the world. Indeed, 21 Nobel Laureates have studied, taught or conducted research at ETH Zurich, underlining the excellent reputation of the institute. Transferring its knowledge to the private sector and society at large is one of ETH Zurich’s primary concerns. ETH Zurich also helps find long-term solutions to timely global challenges. Focal points of its research include energy supply, risk management, developing the cities of the future, global food security and human health.

In 1993, Switzerland participated for the first time in the Framework Programs of the European Union. The University of Zurich (UZH), with its 26,000 students, is Switzerland’s largest university. Founded in 1833, UZH was Europe’s first university to be established by a democratic political system; today, UZH is one of the foremost universities in the German-speaking world. Made up of seven faculties covering some 100 different subject areas, the University offers a wide variety of Bachelor’s, Master’s and Ph.D. programs. In addition, UZH’s continuing education programs offer excellent learning opportunities.

As a member of the League of European Research Universities (LERU), the University of Zurich belongs to Europe’s most prestigious research institutions. Numerous distinctions highlight the University’s international renown in the fields of medicine, immunology, genetics, neuroscience and structural biology as well as in economics. To date, the Nobel Prize has been conferred on 12 UZH scholars.

Annika Glauner and I first met at the 54th annual meeting in November, and since that time has joined Jim Casey and me as a co-chair of the international track for NCURA’s 55th annual meeting in August 2013.

Since 2007, Annika has been a Senior Research and Program Manager at EU GrantsAccess, a joint office for international programs between ETH Zurich — the Swiss Federal Institute of Technology in Zurich — and the University of Zurich, Switzerland’s largest university. She is an active member of the Community of European Research Project Managers of the League of European Research Universities (LERU), a member of the Professional Development Group of the European Association of Research Managers and Administrators (EARMA), and since 2011 Secretary of NCURA’s International Region. In addition, she is a mentor within the KoWi Brussels EU Mentoring Program (please see the following link for information about KoWi: http://www.kowi.de/en/desktopdefault.aspx/tabid-273/1036_read-1269/).
Annika, please tell us about your background and what attracted you to research administration?

In 1995 I entered the realm of European research schemes for the very first time. I was working at the Center for Art and Media Karlsruhe’s (ZKM) Institute for Visual Media, and the Institute was invited to participate in defining schemata for “Intelligent Information Interfaces,” or simply i³, an Esprit Long-Term Research program initiated by the European Commission. The head of the Institute and I participated as representatives from the ZKM. The goal of i³ was to develop new human-centered interfaces for interacting with information, aimed at the future broad population. i³ aimed at a radical departure from the then-present-day human-machine interface concepts and did this under the assumption that this could only be done guided by a long-term vision intertwining human, societal and technological factors. The initiative focused on launching research on new forms of interaction placing people as active participants rather than passive recipients of information. I was both involved in a consortium formulating these new human-centered visions and from 1996 onward in the first call and two of the first i³ projects. I was attracted to the boundaries between art and science, fascinated by the innovation potential of new media and engaged in the description and composition of reception spaces for expressive forms in art and science. One focus was the questioning of social reality and the formal analysis of the reality we perceive. Working in international and multidisciplinary teams and contexts was one of the most inspiring experiences that led not only to catalyzing dialogues and cutting-edge results but also to my believe that the status quo is never an option and working in any research area means exploring and defining it as a cultural living environment permanently new.

Despite working as a senior project manager within the strategic design team at Philips Design and for a long time as a curator, before becoming a member of the EU GrantsAccess team I had been engaged in “outside-in thinking” in applying a diversity of perspective, and interested in how the future might unfold. Consequently my interests today are not that far away from my fascination in the 1990s, as one of my current research interests focuses on the impact of social media on intercultural communication and its challenges for networks for international researchers. In other words, working in research administration is an endorsement of my career so far. At EU GrantsAccess I am part of global research endeavors that address the most critical challenges world-wide, and this allows everyone involved to gain the insight, confidence and capabilities we all need to shape the future – and this is a unique opportunity.

Please tell us about your work at GrantsAccess?

John, your introduction of me captured very well the context in which I live and work. My tasks at EU GrantsAccess are varied, inspiring, challenging and rather internationally embedded. On a day-to-day basis we inform and support researchers from the greater area of Zurich in their efforts to find the right funding scheme for their research area and competence – be it regional, national or international, though the European funding schemes are our main area of expertise. We take care of administrative issues when it comes to the researchers working at ETH Zurich or the University of Zurich, we offer custom-made support in the pre-and post-award phase for these researchers as well as the administrative staff of both institutions. Organizing and carrying out events and workshops as well as training modules and conferences are part of our everyday expertise.

Let’s not forget, however, that Switzerland, though the global hub of robotics and automation and right in the heart of Europe, has slightly less than 8 million inhabitants, 12 universities, and is not a member state of the European Union but an associated state to the Union only since 2007 (meaning that it does not have the same right as a member state). International collaborations are crucial to the research enterprise, to the scientists and universities, and to us as a support office for the research community. Consequently, EU GrantsAccess is an active member of numerous national and international networks as you outlined in the beginning: LERU, IDEA League, Eurresearch Network, EURAXESS, and EARMA and NCURA to name the principal ones. All members of the EU GrantsAccess team need to network, need to know about the (inter)national “research scene,” along with regional, national and international funding opportunities, the high-potential researchers, and the international strategies of home institutions, etc. Networks provide access to a range of intellectual backgrounds and professional experiences; they are consortia around new ideas, as they are so much more than an array of experts but professionals, who challenge us to challenge ourselves, to make connections, to ask better questions. Currently, I am involved in two European research projects both as researcher as well as research administrator, which allows me to promote learning as a co-creative process. We are developing generic monitoring tool that can be easily customized to the context within they are used and define indicators as methods for tracking progress, iterating solutions and identifying unintended consequences. Being involved in the definition and implementation of projects targeting at international research administrators and managers reminds me of my state of being in constant beta and allows us to invest in ourselves.

Annika, tell us something about the personal and institutional benefits of being involved in NCURA?

Being involved in NCURA is an outstanding opportunity as it allows us to intensify our understanding of the US and global research landscape. Via this forum we have been granted unique access to resources of the NSF and NIH, not to mention the contacts we have made during the conferences and via NCURA’s Collaborate! platform. European research institutions and Europe as a whole are investing in international cooperation as it plays an increasingly important role in tackling major global challenges as energy, environment, climate change, food security and fighting diseases. Going it alone is not an option in research and innovation. The only way to succeed in research, technological development, and innovation is to work together: combining and sharing resources, including best practices; avoiding redundancy; and benefiting from economies of scale. Networking and collaborating with US institutions is crucial for us, to our home institutions, to Zurich, to Switzerland. Thanks to the NCURA network with its information and communication resources we stay informed on the development in the US while being in Europe.

Thank you very much, Annika. Thank you, John.

Dr. John M. Carfora, CCEP, is Associate Provost for Research Advancement and Compliance at Loyola Marymount University in Los Angeles, and co-author of The Art of Funding and Implementing Ideas: A Guide to Proposal Development and Project Management (Sage, 2011). John is a 2007 recipient of NCURA’s Distinguished Service Award.
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Defining the Problem

If all faculty were as organized and self-disciplined as the fictional Sheldon Cooper (CBS’ Big Bang Theory), wouldn’t our jobs as Research Administrators (RAs) be simpler for the typical research grant application? Where is the episode that shows us how the diverse and interdisciplinary science team of Sheldon, Leonard, Amy, Raj, Bernadette and Howard sit down to write a grant together? Even with Sheldon Cooper’s compulsive need for organization and attention to detail, we imagine the “Winning the Big Grant” episode of the Big Bang Theory to end in total chaos and frustration. Can you picture it? At 4:59 PM, everyone is huddled into the RAs office, holding their breath and waiting for the Grants.gov spinning disk to release a tracking number. Only to receive the fatal error message that leads to a missed deadline and an emotional “Big Bang”. In the real-world of proposal development, the disastrous result of this illustration is all too possible. Large interdisciplinary proposal development offers complex challenges and, although many elements and challenges are similar to single investigator proposals, the volume and complexity is arguably more difficult to balance given the collaborative nature and time constraints in grant submission. Thus, task timelines are proposed as a means to avoid chaos and errors in the submission process.

Planning to Plan

Developing a plan is the first step toward successfully reaching any major milestone, and grant writing is no different (Russel and Morrison, 2011). The major U.S. funding agencies all caution applicants on planning, some more succinctly than others. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) clearly lists as a preparatory step in the grant writing process to, “Develop a feasible timeline with draft application deadlines. Be realistic about the time it can take to write and revise the application” (U.S Department of Health and Human Services, 2012). The National Science Foundation (NSF) mentions among “Other Considerations” to “Organize a good working team. Distribute duties and develop a firm schedule of activities needed to prepare the proposal in time to meet the proposal deadline” (NSF, 2004). While neither NIH nor NSF suggest the length of time necessary to develop a good proposal, the 90 day window that is minimal for many special calls from the NSF suggest that no less than 12 weeks should go into the planning of any proposal application. The following process challenges us to think about distinct proposal phases, key players and submission timelines.

While putting together a credible proposal in only 12 weeks is a challenge for any experienced single investigator who is pre-equipped with data and references, the difficulty can easily compound when a mid-career investigator steps forward to orchestrate his/her first large multidisciplinary proposal development team. The mix of multiple research units, institutions, complex budgets, cost share, and management plans can push even the best PI over the edge. With the 12 week challenge in mind, we set out to devise a model timeline (Table 1) that identifies the major tasks involved in the development of large, multidisciplinary proposals. As the timeline was developed, it became clear that the roles and responsibilities of participating faculty and RAs needed to be considered as coordination that is central to the success of concentric activities.

We acknowledge that a “one size fits all” concept cannot be applied to research administration or grant development at all institutions, but the basic tenets are transferrable. Keeping this in mind, the three phases of the timeline and understanding the type of work in each of those phases are the transferrable concepts. We envision the Principal Investigator (PI) using this model to prevent “task slippage” that will ultimately lead to an insurmountable backlog of work in the last 5 days of the deadline. Guarding against such a pressurized time window is a central challenge that drives the typical RA and Development Specialist (DV) as both project managers and catalysts in the process (Porter, 2005).

Three Phases of Proposal Development

Our timeline is divided into three distinct phases (Table 1; Framing, Collaboration and Refinement). The phases are nominally broken into equal time periods; however, overlaps do occur, and they are provided as a high-level way of understanding whether a team is “behind” or “ahead” in planning resources. Thus, the phases

Continued on page 22
Table 1. 12 Week timeline for large interdisciplinary proposal development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Goal Proposal Process – 12 Week Example</th>
<th>Framing Phase</th>
<th>Collaboration Phase</th>
<th>Refinement Phase</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Week:</strong></td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Analysis and Planning</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Distribute RFP; Gather Intelligence; Recruit PI</td>
<td>Univ/DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Finalize Key Participant &amp; Potential Collaborator Lists</td>
<td>PI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Problem Development</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Define Vision &amp; Goals; Identify Themes/Discriminators</td>
<td>PI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Develop Proposal Outline &amp; Estimate Budget</td>
<td>PI/RA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cost Share Discussion w/ Advocate</td>
<td>PI/RA/DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Resources for Complex Admin Issues (e.g., IP)&quot;</td>
<td>PI/RA/DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assess Needs and Coordinate Institutional Data</td>
<td>PI/RA/DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refine Outline with Project team</td>
<td>PI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify &amp; Draft Potential Graphics</td>
<td>PI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Program Officer Input</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Contact Program Officer/Advisors for Feedback</td>
<td>PI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refine Outline/Themes with Project Team</td>
<td>PI/DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Partnerships</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Recruit External/Internal Partners</td>
<td>PI/RA/DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refine External/Internal Partner Involvement</td>
<td>PI/DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Solicit and Obtain Support Letters</td>
<td>PI/DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Management/Personnel</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Identify Management Structure</td>
<td>PI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Collect and Edit Biosketches/C&amp;Ps/Appendices</td>
<td>PI/RA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Check on Participant List</td>
<td>PI/RA/DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write and Secure Internal Commitment Letters</td>
<td>PI/RA/DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Budget</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construct 1st draft of Internal (PSU) budget</td>
<td>PI/RA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine External Partner Needs and Distribution</td>
<td>PI/RA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Determine Cost Share Needs (if any); schedule MCM</td>
<td>PI/RA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Refine Overall Budget</td>
<td>PI/RA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Secure Cost Share (if any)</td>
<td>PI/RA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Final Budget and Justification</td>
<td>PI/RA</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Proposal Writing</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Assign writing sections</td>
<td>PI</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Write Section Components</td>
<td>PI/DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compile Draft 1</td>
<td>PI/DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Writing Team Edit</td>
<td>PI/DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Red Team Review</td>
<td>PI/DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Address Red Team Comments</td>
<td>PI/DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Editing Iterations</td>
<td>PI/DV</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Compliance Checks and PIAF Signoff</td>
<td>All</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

= Advocate Approval; Note: Blue Coded text Indicates Advocate Involvement

Final Budget (external partners included) 1 week prior to deadline
Final technical pieces and supplemental documents 48 hours prior
### Table 2. Roles and responsibilities by phase of proposal timeline.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Player</th>
<th>Phase 1: Framing</th>
<th>Phase 2: Collaboration</th>
<th>Phase 3: Refinement</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Principal Investigator (PI)</strong></td>
<td>*Needs to be supportive of the 12-week plan. Ultimately controls the process, but relies on key players to complete tasks and stay on the timeline.</td>
<td>*Refine partner participation; identify external commitment letters</td>
<td>*Track writing assignments &amp; follow-up with missing contributions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Finalize key participant &amp; collaborator list; Recruit partners</td>
<td>• Finalize writing assignments</td>
<td>• Finalize management structure</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Define proposal outline (incl. Vision, Goals, &amp; Themes)</td>
<td>• Identify management structure</td>
<td>• Finalize budget, justification and cost share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Start writing assignment outline</td>
<td>• Refine budget and cost share</td>
<td>• Finalize Commitment Letters (internal/external)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identify graphics</td>
<td>• Identify internal commitment letters</td>
<td>• Review technical plan and make final edits based on University review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Draft/estimate budget</td>
<td>• Compile technical plan draft text and prepare for University review</td>
<td>• Verify that Institutional approvals have been obtained to submit the proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identify necessary University resources (Admin Issues, Space, Data, Cost Share)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interpret solicitation, and identify appropriate teaming strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Advocate (AV)</strong></td>
<td>*Needs to be identified by University and PI. We recommend an institutional administrator (i.e. Research Dean, Institute Director, Department Head)</td>
<td>*Verify writing assignments and draft text components are on track.</td>
<td>*Participate in the proposal University review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Participate in University limited submission process</td>
<td>• Support the PI</td>
<td>*Support the PI</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Contact with PI to verify necessary University resources (space, cost share, admin support)</td>
<td></td>
<td>*Verify that University approvals have been obtained to submit the proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Verify that the PI has completed initial proposal vision/goals outline</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>University</strong></td>
<td>• Organize limited submission process</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Select and support PI/Advocate with necessary resources</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Development Specialist (DV)</strong></td>
<td>*Are typically Masters or PhD-level professionals who serve as catalysts in the proposal process and participants in writing/editing</td>
<td></td>
<td>*Assist w/ finalizing commitment letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Serve as a catalyst in University limited submission process</td>
<td></td>
<td>*Coordinate and make final edits based on University review</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assist PI in conceptualizing Draft/estimate budget</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identify necessary University resources (Admin Issues, Space, Data, Cost Share)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interpret solicitation, and identify appropriate teaming strategies</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Research Administrators (RAs)</strong></td>
<td>*University authority for proposal submission. Assist w/ compliance, budget and administrative functions.</td>
<td></td>
<td>Finalize budget, justification and cost share</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Draft/estimate budget</td>
<td></td>
<td>*Assist with finalizing commitment letters</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Identify necessary University resources (Admin Issues, Space, Data, Cost Share)</td>
<td></td>
<td>*Review proposal text for compliance issues</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Interpret solicitation, provide feedback; contact sponsor if necessary</td>
<td></td>
<td>*Verify that University approvals have been obtained to submit the proposal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Contact participants for Biosketches, Current/Pending Support, CIO tables, Appendix material</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Refine budget and cost share</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Assist w/ commitment letters (internal/external)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Compile draft text</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

MARCH/APRIL 2013
represent a macro-planning guide in which the PI, DV, RA and Advocate (AV), can monitor major milestones and detect delay in the process. For example, notice the three blue triangles in Figure 1. In each phase there is a natural point at which the AV can give feedback to the PI and/or make decisions about future resource investments in the proposal. In the framing phase, a good time for AV involvement is immediately after the goals, vision, themes and discriminators have been defined. In this way, the AV remains engaged at critical feedback points in the collaboration and refinement phases.

Each participant has distinct roles and responsibilities throughout the three planning phases (Table 2). Depending on the type of institution and specialized needs within the proposal, adjustments could be made to these descriptions at the beginning of any proposal planning process to better coordinate and improve the chances of success.

Sustainable Process
To translate the idea of a sustainable proposal development model, in terms of personnel resources invested, we have conceptualized the amount of effort that might be required of both the PI and the RA+DV support team (Figure 1). We lump RA and DV by adding them together to show the macro differences between the faculty (PI) effort and the combined effort of administration-related functions. In this figure, the personnel time commitments in Table 1 (above) were equally weighted and transferred into a 40-hour work week for a hypothetical well-managed team. Team member effort may vary greatly across different types of proposals, but few would disagree with the realization that procrastination by team members early in the process leads to long work days in the last week and increases the likelihood of errors and missed opportunities in proposals. We hope the 12 week planning guide: 1) Serves as a starting place for planning of personnel and other resource decisions for a sustainable proposal process, 2) Gives the RA a tool for assisting PIs in understanding the differences between single-investigator and large multidisciplinary efforts, and 3) Provides a time and content guided framework for collaboration among a diverse set of professionals… all in an effort to avoid the Big Bang.

Final Thoughts
This model timeline is not intended as a “one size fits all” approach, but the three distinct phases serve as modules that are transferrable and may be adapted to any specialized institutional or proposal needs. Our focus on planning is a topic every research office deals with and discussion converges to a universal tenet: Careful planning and conscientious attention to timelines help avoid the all-nighters the week before submission and proclivity for errors or missed opportunities in proposals. We hope the 12 week planning guide: 1) Serves as a starting place for planning of personnel and other resource decisions for a sustainable proposal process, 2) Gives the RA a tool for assisting PIs in understanding the differences between single-investigator and large multidisciplinary efforts, and 3) Provides a time and content guided framework for collaboration among a diverse set of professionals… all in an effort to avoid the Big Bang.

Acknowledgements
The authors wish to acknowledge David W. Richardson, Associate Vice President for Research and Peter E. Schiffer, past Associate Vice President for Research, for their roles in developing the Strategic Interdisciplinary Research Office (SIRO) at The Pennsylvania State University.

References

Kevin Dressler, PhD, and Lorraine M. Mulfinger, PhD, are proposal development specialists in the Strategic Interdisciplinary Research Office (SIRO) at The Pennsylvania State University, and Niki Page, is the Lead for Pre-Award Administration and Proposal Submission of SIRO. Together they share responsibility for directing and supporting multidisciplinary teams in the development of technical and cost proposals for large and strategic research-related initiatives. Kevin can be reached at kxd13@psu.edu while Lorraine can be reached at lxm14@psu.edu. Niki can be reached at nlg4@psu.edu.
Research Administration Beyond Your Desk: Are You Looking at the Whole Picture?

By Bo Bogdanski

The theme of this March/April edition of the NCURA Magazine is “We’re here to help.” I’ve been thinking about the ways research administrators interact with each other in professional situations. For the most part, the cooperation is acceptable and appropriate. After all, if we can’t help each other, we are really putting ourselves on proverbial islands. But there are times where our own institutional priorities can get in the way of effectively and collegially cooperating with other institutions to meet common objectives. Although interaction between research administrators covers a whole gambit of topics, I’ve created the following fiction using subaward proposals, administration and closeout. Although fictional, all situations are based on real experiences that our team has had to deal with more times than we’d like to admit over the past several years. I would hope this story leads to some introspection in our overall working relations with other research administrators either at our institutions or companion institutions.

Let’s start with the proposal. When my team found out that our PI was working with an East Maybe University (EMU) PI on a proposal containing a potential subaward from EMU to us, it seemed like a good idea to contact the EMU Office of Sponsored Agreements. Chances are the research administrator at EMU doesn’t know a thing about the potential subaward. My team considered it fortunate to get some advance warning of a potential proposal from some good soul. So, it would seem to me that EMU would appreciate a heads up and an acknowledgement that we are willing and capable of forwarding subaward information in an expeditious manner.

Here’s where the fun begins. I check the NCURA member listing and contact the EMU central office to establish a relationship. Hopefully EMU will contact their department to start or continue their internal processes. But there was no response. The real rub comes when I contact them again and get, “I’ve been very busy and that’s why I haven’t returned your call (from five days ago).” I think, I’m busy too but this is something that needs to get done. Or sometimes I get “that’s not my area so I didn’t think you wanted to talk to me.” I say to myself, “then why didn’t you tell me whose area it was? Telepathy isn’t my preferred method of communication.” The EMU central administrator tells me to contact the department. Now I love all department administrators as brothers and/or sisters and if I thought it necessary to call the department, I would have. But I contact the department and they seem appreciative.

When I have what I perceive is a more complex matter, I like to use the phone and discuss the matter with another research administrator. After about three minutes of my explanation and a five minute discussion, I hear, “Send me an e-mail.” I’m thinking, “What? Didn’t you just hear what I said?” So 25 minutes later I complete an e-mail with the information from my original call. I wonder if phones and interpersonal communication are becoming obsolete.

After a few months, our PI tells me the award was made to the prime. I always find it funny that our PI knows administrative information before our sponsored programs office, but maybe that’s just an issue at my institution. So I contact the prime asking for a status update. The response is, “We (in central) haven’t received the internal paperwork yet. Call the PI.” Since central administration is most likely to prepare the subaward, I’m wondering why central doesn’t want to contact their PI to get the subaward information? So, I contact the department and find out that their necessary, internal paperwork will be submitted within the week. Two weeks late, I contact the department to get a status update. Guess what? I’m told to call central because they forwarded everything that was necessary for the subaward to be established. I then contact central again and they said it was sent to the department to be distributed. Who is responsible for this thing?

Finally the award arrives with all the necessary sections and signed by their authorized official. I start to review and lo-and-behold the subaward agreement includes their State law, indemnification and a termination clause which requires re-procurement costs if we don’t complete the work. I contact the sender and mention my objections and the response is that their organization uses the same template for all subawards. However, since the changes I recommended are easily made, they will send me a new contract. I wonder, why not just forward a draft in the first place. Or even better, FDP has a nice template.

Most of the time, the subaward is forwarded with an attached, executed prime contract which is incorporated into the subcontract by reference. However, as I review the fully executed prime, I see “DFAR 252.204-7000 – Disclosure of Information.” I place yet another call to EMU only to hear that they know this is a problem but they decided to accept it anyway. Well that’s just great for your institution but what about the sub that may have just a little more problem accepting ‘out-of-the-ordinary’ clauses or requirements? Did they just assume that we would fold because of their decision or did they really not know this was a problem? I think it would have been a good idea to let us know about the objectional clause before EMU signed the prime contract or even better, let us review the prime before they agreed.

The negotiations are over and we sign the agreement and send it back to the prime. However, three weeks later, we still haven’t received the fully executed agreement. Now with EMU on speed dial, I call again to try to find the person at the prime institution with the agreement. Would you believe I find out our e-mail wasn’t received? When I die and go to heaven, I want to finally get to see where all the lost e-mails go. Anyway we resend it and four weeks later the fully executed agreement arrives. I can’t help but to think, “It’s their template and they agreed to the subaward wording. Why four weeks?”

So now the subaward is about to end. Our PI asked the prime PI about the prospects of a no cost extension (a divine right of every grant and contract manifested to an institution of higher education). Our PI received an affirmative response. So guess what? I get to start the series of contacts again, trying to find out if the prime is going amend our subaward, when that amendment might be processed and face the prospect of
Jeremy T. Miner’s Desk

Small shop PUIs have an almost ADHD nature, simultaneously balancing pre-award, post-award, and compliance issues. For the long-term good of promoting student-faculty collaborative research, plans need to be made now for enhancing the ORSP website and use of social media. “Really? Only 10% of students and 20% of faculty who took the usability test could correctly locate the answer for who to contact with grant-related questions?” February brings the next round of NIH applications—and the FCOI documentation and training that goes with them. “Correct: You did not have to do this last time; the federal regulations changed and, presumably, you don’t want to face the liabilities of noncompliance.” There’s always the emergency de jour: “How is it even possible that the sponsor issued the check to you personally for a human subjects research project?!?” Not bad for a Monday. Then came the day’s final email: ABC-CLIO wants the manuscript for the 5th edition of Proposal Planning & Writing by Friday so it can hit the stands in fall. “D’oh!”

Jeremy T. Miner, M.A., is Director of Grants and Contracts at the University of Wisconsin-Eau Claire and Chair-elect of Region IV. He is an active NCURA member at the national and regional levels, serving on committees, presenting workshops and concurrent sessions, and publishing journal articles. He can be reached at minerjt@uwec.edu.

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What’s on my DESK

Jeremy T. Miner’s Desk

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Improving the Efficiency of the Research Award Setup Process

By Mike Daniel and Rob Rubens

The setup of a research award is a high profile, outward facing, linchpin process in the award lifecycle. There are several key stakeholders, including academic and department leadership, principal investigators (PIs), and local research administrative support, all of them cognizant of the time required to set up a research award. These various groups' perceptions of the efficiency of the award setup process greatly affects their overall impression of the customer service level provided by central research administration offices.

The setup process often involves several personnel handoffs, from the pre and post-award functions, and can also include various compliance offices (COI, IRB, IACUC, IBC), general counsel, technology transfer, and sometimes offices outside of the research administration infrastructure, such as information technology. Each step provides an opportunity for hiccups in an award’s progression, but consequently each identifies areas to streamline. Fortunately, setup is one of the easier research administration areas to quantifiably measure and improve via metrics, as there are myriad defined checkpoints. This paper will address key roles and responsibilities surrounding award setup as well as valuable metrics to motivate staff, identify bottlenecks, and ultimately improve the efficiency and effectiveness of the overall process.

Award setup often forms the bridge between pre-award and post-award within a research administration organization. At a high level, all new awards or award modifications, once received, must be entered into the institution’s various internal systems, including the pre-award tracking and post-award financial system. Communication of award receipt and basic award requirements (reporting requirements, budgetary terms) to PIs and local administrators must also occur.

Award setup also establishes the foundation for effective future management of the award, including meeting technical and financial reporting requirements, determining allowable costs, and tracking other salient milestones. Accurately recording data points during award setup is critical to effective and compliant award monitoring, as well as efficient cash management. Many prominent research administrators have recognized the importance of award setup to the smooth operation of their organizations. An example of a recent process improvement initiative at the University of Wisconsin Madison (UW-Madison) centered on effectively employing metrics to improve the speed of award setup times: “Using data to capture processing times for key steps in the award setup process, UW-Madison was able to quantify its baseline performance and identify ways to improve the process through workflow, IT, and training enhancements. The outcome of the initiative was an overall reduction in award setup times by over 60 percent. On an ongoing basis, UW-Madison has been able to maintain fast award setup times as a direct result of monitoring goal vs. actual performance data in this area on a monthly basis.” - Kim Moreland, Assoc. Vice Chancellor for Research Administration, and Director, Research and Sponsored Programs, University of Wisconsin.

Initial data entry errors create the potential for a butterfly effect downstream, ultimately increasing audit risk. Many other research administration functions rely on accurate award setup including invoicing of research accounts, financial reporting, Facilities & Administration (F&A) rate negotiation, effort reporting, and institutional...
budgeting. Data points such as F&A rate, F&A base, and overall budget, including personnel effort, must be accurately captured.

It is important that award setup proceeds as smoothly and efficiently as possible. Take cash flow, for example. If process holdups delay establishing the award account in the institution's financial system, the expensing of project costs and possibly reimbursement for costs already incurred are delayed. Many institutions allow investigators to utilize a “pre-award” or “advance” account for project expenses in anticipation of the official award. This holding account houses expenditures prior to the negotiation or receipt of formal award documentation. However, until the award has been received by the institution and fully set up in all applicable pre-award and post-award systems, the institution cannot bill the sponsor for research expenditures incurred. From a cash management perspective, timely conversion from a pre-award or advance account to an executed grant or contract is crucial in order to optimize cash flow at an institution.

Exact roles and responsibilities in the process can vary greatly among institutions due to differences in the sizes and structures of research administration offices as well as approaches utilized. Examples of different organizational approaches to award setup include:

- Separate personnel in both the pre-award and post-award offices, each having a unique role in the process
- Award setup as its own unit within either the pre-award or post-award office
- A cradle-to-grave approach where a single research administration unit manages the process from proposal to award, including setting up awards in all systems

One common theme found across institutions, however, is that the PI and/or the PI’s administrative support often play a key role in the process. For example, the PI may be responsible for acknowledging the terms and conditions of the award before the award is accepted by the institution and research costs incurred. While each of the above approaches is valid, coordination of tasks among the different roles in the process remains critical.

Researchers value a high level of efficiency and accuracy in award setup, as they need the ability to incur expenses as quickly as possible upon award execution. Additionally, the ability to pay research staff salaries, purchase equipment and supplies, book travel, etc. is dependent on this cycle time. Delays in award setup will result in decreased customer satisfaction, with PIs often not hesitating to communicate their dissatisfaction and frustration to university leadership. Essentially award setup is a gate-keeping step for beginning research: spending and progress can only occur as fast as awards are set up.

To further understand the importance of the award setup process, it is useful to take a look at key steps in the process in more depth, including personnel responsible for proper execution, pitfalls to avoid, and key metrics related to each phase.

### 1. Receipt of the Award Document

Award setup begins when the award document, e.g., a fully executed contract or notice of grant award, is received by the institution. An intake staff member matches the award document to its associated proposal and records receipt of the award document in an internal tracking system. Typically, notification of award receipt is then electronically sent to the PI/department. At this point, it is imperative to begin tracking cycle times. Certain documents are time sensitive, requiring a signature and quick turnaround to the sponsor after receipt. Using the initial award receipt date as the starting data point of an award setup cycle makes sense as (i) it is the reasonable starting point from which administrative action can occur, (ii) it allows for tracking as process steps take place across various roles, and (iii) the receipt date will likely be viewed by the PI as the starting point upon which action is expected of central research administration.

**Pitfalls at this phase can be avoided with the following steps:**

- Avoid communication breakdowns: Award documents and related information sometimes may not flow between the central research administration office and departments efficiently, causing dissatisfaction for PIs and their staff.
- Identify and associate award documents with corresponding proposal file(s), which requires additional due diligence upon award receipt, depending on both the clarity of data on the award document as well as the strength of the institution’s proposal tracking system.

**Two key metrics to begin tracking in this phase:**

1. The receipt date of an award as the starting point for an award setup processing time metric
2. The type of award received (new, modification, subcontract) to enable a comparison of cycle times by type

### 2. Review and Negotiation of the Award Document

Next, staff will review the award document, identifying troublesome clauses, conducting compliance reviews, comparing the document against the corresponding proposal, negotiating with the sponsor if necessary, then accepting and entering the relevant data in the pre-award system.

Review of award documents will vary depending on complexity of the terms and conditions of the award, as well as the staff member’s familiarity with the sponsor. This research administrator holds responsibility for noting special requirements and questioning non-standard terms. If issues are identified and fall outside his or her immediate realm of expertise, the administrator
should bring in additional resources within the office or elsewhere in the institution, e.g. the technology transfer, general counsel, or human resources departments, to resolve outstanding questions. Subsequently, applicable compliance checks related to conflict of interest (COI), human subjects research (IRB), animal research (IACUC), and hazardous materials (IBC) should be completed at this stage.

It is at this point in the overall process that central research administration must verify the PI has taken comprehensive and necessary actions to gain all applicable compliance-related approvals. These compliance checks are a regulatory responsibility for the institution and comprise a critical step of the overall award setup process. If necessary, the award is then formally accepted by returning an executed contract or award document to the sponsor.

**Pitfalls at this phase can be avoided with the following steps:**

- Communicate necessary forms and procedures related to open compliance issues with the PI/department prior to award receipt, so award setup is not delayed. Award setup personnel should continue to follow up with compliance offices and the PI to ensure a smooth flow through the applicable compliance approval processes.
- Establish clearly defined issue escalation procedures to address problematic award terms and conditions. For example, an institution could automatically escalate award negotiations that have gone on for more than 30 days since award receipt. Any delays and causes thereof should be tracked for future process improvement.

**Two key metrics to begin tracking in this phase:**

1. Time to review an award document. This could be defined as total pre-award review time for those institutions with separate pre-award and post-award offices. There is a benefit in tracking total review time for each administrative role in the process; leadership will gain a deeper understanding of the different components of overall process cycle time.
2. Number of awards put on compliance “holds,” length of compliance holds, and process time utilized in waiting for information from other offices (PI, departments, and compliance offices).

### 3. Award Setup in the Institution’s Financial System

At this juncture staff reviews the award’s reporting and financial requirements to determine payment schedule and disbursement method, e.g. letter of credit, invoicing, or fixed payments. In addition, it may be the case that the sponsor has awarded a reduced budget versus what was originally proposed. If this occurs many institutions will require the PI to provide an updated budget to reflect the awarded amount before proceeding with award setup. Some institutions will only require an updated budget if the reduction crosses a certain threshold, such as 20% of the total proposed budget. Using clearly communicated budget reduction threshold will send a clear signal to campus when a revised budget will be required.

Special reporting requirements should also be identified and noted, e.g. FFATA, cost sharing, and the frequency of sponsor financial reporting. The administrator should then establish this information in the institution’s financial system as well as any additional “shadow” system being utilized to track award data. This step establishes the research account and creates the unique account number.

### Summary of Highlighted Metrics for Each Step of Award Setup

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Step</th>
<th>Metric</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tr>
<td>1. Receipt of Award Document</td>
<td>Award setup processing time (receipt date)</td>
<td>Time to review an award document</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Cycle times comparison by award type: new, modification, subcontract</td>
<td>Total number of award setups over a specified period of time</td>
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<td></td>
<td>Length of compliance holds</td>
<td>Total award setup cycle time: award receipt to communication to PI that he/she may begin spending</td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Process time utilized in waiting for information from other offices</td>
<td>Percentage of awards with corresponding “pre-award accounts”</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>2. Review &amp; Negotiation of Award Document</td>
<td>Number of awards put on compliance “holds”</td>
<td>Cycle time from end of pre-award setup to end of post-award setup</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Administrative award setup cycle time, or time from award receipt to completion of post-award setup</td>
<td>Average time before pre-award accounts are converted to effective grant revenue accounts</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>3. Award Setup in Financial System</td>
<td>Cycle time to set up new awards vs. award modifications</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td>4. Award Account Distribution</td>
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</table>
Pitfalls at this phase can be avoided with the following steps:

- Communicate the need to revise the project budget either internally (PI/Department) or externally (consultants/subrecipients) without delay.
- Ensure all award information is consistently and accurately transferred to post-award from pre-award.
- Completely capture award attributes in the financial post-award system; downstream financial processes and reporting can be affected.

Four key metrics to begin tracking in this phase:

1. Total number of award setups over a specified period of time, e.g. annually, quarterly, etc.
2. Cycle time from end of pre-award setup to end of post-award setup
3. Administrative award setup cycle time, or time from award receipt to completion of post-award setup
4. Cycle time to set up new awards vs. award modifications as well as various types of awards, e.g. contract vs. grants, federal grants vs. nonfederal grants

Total award setup cycle time - from award receipt to final communication to the PI granting allowance to spend - can now be captured. This metric measures overall process cycle time as well as interim cycle time (pre, post, department, and ancillary compliance offices) and allows for an assessment of the process efficiency.

Pitfalls at this phase can be avoided with the following step:

- Prompt, concise communication to the PI and research team once award setup is complete: although the need for clear communication is uniform throughout the process, it is especially critical at this stage as there are no additional administrative hurdles present that would inhibit the PI from beginning to spend funds awarded from the sponsor.

Two key metrics to begin tracking in this phase:

1. Total award setup cycle time - from award receipt to communication to the PI that he or she may begin spending award funds
2. Percentage of awards with corresponding “pre-award accounts,” as well as the average time before pre-award accounts are converted to effective grant revenue accounts

Frequent communication during the award setup process among all stakeholders is critical to process success. Especially within and across pre- and post-award offices, free and open exchange of award information is vital for teams and individuals. In larger offices where award setup is supported by a variety of roles, it is crucial that key players remain in constant communication when trying to resolve award setup issues. Also worth highlighting once more for central research administration offices is the importance of communicating with and seeking feedback from its customers, i.e. the PIs and their local administrative support.

It is also important to measure performance metrics, and utilize them to drive process improvement. The benefit derived from capturing and analyzing these metrics will depend on multiple factors, including:

1. Recognizing staff for strong performance when warranted
2. Identifying where additional resources may be needed or where processes can be reviewed and changed to enhance efficiency
3. Detecting process bottlenecks both inside and outside of central pre and post-award offices, e.g. departments, compliance offices, problem sponsors
4. Setting goals for processing times to motivate staff as well as provide detail behind Service Level Agreement with the research community
5. Prioritizing workloads and reducing backlogs, e.g. redeploying staff to focus on awards held up for compliance reasons
6. Transparent reporting to leadership and campus to improve customer service and perception

In summary, optimizing the award setup process will lead to a plethora of tangible benefits for a research institution. A smooth, timely, and informative award setup process, evaluated by well-considered metrics, will boost customer service and satisfaction, improve cash management through the quick conversion of awards received into active research accounts, and enhance institutional compliance.

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As research administrators, we are all busy. We experience the busy-ness all the more when it doesn’t feel that everyone is pulling in the same direction. In particular, central office and department administrators are in the same proverbial boat, working to get the grants out and the awards in, but we don’t always seem to be rowing in unison. Every department administrator can recall times when they felt their central office was being aloof, unnecessarily delaying progress, or just plain wrong on an issue. Similarly, every central office administrator can recount tales of (seemingly) unreasonable faculty/department requests, myriad attempts to skirt the rules, and (thankfully rare) plain attempts to break them. Fortunately, there is cause for hope, as there are ways we can improve the situation. The growing academic literature on research administration offers suggestions to help us pull together in the same direction.

What does the literature say?

It is a sign of the professionalization, importance, and increasing complexity of research administration that it has drawn more academic attention. Three recent doctoral dissertations, Baca (2006), Cole (2010), and Shambrook (2010), studied research administration from multiple angles. Baca was interested in the concept of quality in research administration, and Cole was interested in the related topic of performance metrics. Whereas, Shambrook examined the work environment and potential health outcomes for administrators. When viewed collectively, their work suggests some ways in which the individual central office administrator can help to lower the temperature of inter-office relations on campus.

Shambrook investigates health behavior, stress, and resiliency among research administrators. She notes that, contrary to public perception, college campuses are high-stress work environments for employees. While early stress studies focused on faculty, Shambrook extends the work to administrators, finding that more than half of survey respondents report very high workplace stress. Though she doesn’t delve into specific causes beyond the high demand low control character of some jobs, it is reasonable to presume that some part of the perceived stress is the result of the occasional friction between department staff/faculty and the central office staff. Whether disagreements over policy or the struggle with last-minute items, these situations often lead to the moments of peak stress that all administrators know. Misperceptions among department staff and faculty regarding the role of the central office can also lead to or exacerbate these situations.

Baca focuses on the central office, and his analysis is based on the concept of Total Quality Management (TQM). TQM is a popular management technique that emphasizes quality in manufacturing. He notes that it has had some application in the service industries, but only recent use in higher education. He finds that with some modification, the quality dimensions of a service-industry TQM model can be adapted to a central sponsored programs office. In particular, Baca finds that a list of eight dimensions appropriately capture the service qualities of research administration. These include two new dimensions which he develops: approachability (which incorporates communication and access) and mutualism (which incorporates reliability, responsiveness, and understanding of the customer). He validates the dimensions by applying them to the University of Arizona Sponsored Projects Services Office.

Like Baca, Cole also focuses on the central office, but her analysis is based on the concept of the Balanced Scorecard. Similar to TQM, the balanced scorecard has been popular (even a fad) in corporate management circles, but it is only lately being applied in higher education. Cole’s analysis consists of a survey of investigators and department administrators at research-intensive universities to gather their perceptions of the performance of their central offices. The responses are used to determine which performance metrics should appear on the Balanced Scorecard. Among the most important metrics she finds are timeliness, fairness, technical expertise, and accessibility.

Though Baca and Cole studied different management tools, the results of their work clearly overlap. It should be no surprise that the areas of commonality re-
late to responsiveness, communication, accessibility, and expertise. These are among core attributes of a competent central office, so it stands to reason that they would surface as TQM dimensions and Balanced Scorecard metrics. However, simply because they appear obvious does not mean that they cannot be levers for individual action by central office personnel.

What can we do?

Using results of Baca and Cole, the central office administrator can take some pretty common-sense, but no less powerful, actions to improve their peer and faculty relationships on campus. First, with respect to responsiveness and timeliness, strive to return all phone calls and e-mails within 24 hours, and send an e-mail acknowledgement when you simply can’t take a call or respond to a lengthy inquiry. Be sure to let the caller or correspondent know when to expect a return call or reply.

Communication involves not only speaking and writing clearly, but also effectively communicating the dual mission of the central office to campus. Central offices both support the effort of faculty to obtain sponsored funding and ensure that sponsor and institutional guidelines and government regulations are followed. It is always a delicate dance, but communicating both missions will help to minimize unrealistic expectations from the departments. By “leaning forward,” i.e. proactively contacting the department administrators or faculty to offer assistance, an administrator will demonstrate that the central office is not just the university cop.

Accessibility and fairness are no-brainers. As professionals, central office staff pride themselves on their objectivity and rational adherence to guidelines, policy, and regulations. Still, it is all too easy to succumb to the temptation to work with a particular department rather than the more difficult ones. One must be forever vigilant that no preferential tendencies enter their work habits, such as screening calls. We must remind ourselves that we are here to help all, not just those we look forward to conversing with. So, the administrator must ensure that they are accessible to all who may need their assistance. An easy way to be more accessible is to meet with department peers and faculty in person on their turf. Face-to-face communication is a sure way to break down barriers and avoid the miscommunication and misperception that can occur with phone and e-mail.

Finally, technical expertise is what central office administrators bring to the party. Departments and faculty depend upon us for our specific knowledge of federal regulations, institutional policy, sponsor guidelines, and grants processing procedures. Each administrator should take the initiative to stay up to date. Joining a sponsor listserv, reading the latest agency updates, refreshing your memory of the Federal Acquisition Regulations (FAR), or poring over latest issue of NCURA Magazine during your lunch break are all great ways to stay up-to-date. Look at each encounter as an opportunity to share knowledge. It all boils down to remembering that we’re here to help. So, start each day by pondering, “Who can I help today?”

Conclusion:

Most administrators will agree that the workplace is stressful and that the work is demanding. However, most would also agree that, in spite of the stress and workload, they find their work to be quite rewarding. To the extent that we can take a moment to remember that we’re here to help, central office administrators can each contribute to lowering the stress level a bit to make our campus workplaces more enjoyable. When in doubt, just remember to ask yourself, “Who can I help today?”

References:


Cole, K. (2010). Principal investigator and department administrator perceptions of services provided by Offices of Research Administration at research universities. Doctoral dissertation, University of South Florida, UMI Number: 3424381


Andre Walker, M.B.A., C.R.A., is a Grants and Contracts Manager in University Research Administration, the central sponsored programs office at The University of Chicago. He is the Contributing Editor for Biomed for NCURA Magazine. He can be reached at awalker1@uchicago.edu
The responsibility of Research Administrators (RAs) is to provide faculty and departments with the best customer service in order for them to achieve their respective research goals. RAs can serve faculty and departments with their pre- and post-award needs by performing their jobs at the highest level of accuracy and efficiency. However, there are additional services that are not considered “job related” duties that can serve faculty and departments with sponsored research. Whether working for a professor, the department or a collaborative effort, it’s the RAs “above and beyond” attitude that will take faculty, departments and ultimately the university to the next level of excellence and sponsored projects funding.

**Departmental**

Create a cohesive atmosphere. Introductions of RAs, especially those new to the department, to faculty and department heads will allow the job-related duties to be personalized to the individual Principal Investigator (PI). This basic premise of establishing relationships allows the RA to become familiar with the professors and their area of investigation and research. Relationships can be established in the following ways: Collaborations (within and outside the institution), individual faculty/staff meetings, and group faculty/staff meetings.

An individual faculty/staff meeting refers to those times when an RA meets with a specific professor one-on-one to get to know the researcher and their needs as well as the type of research conducted. This type of meeting enables the RA to increase their knowledge of the PIs interests, goals and ongoing projects, which can lead to assistance with funding searches, proposal development, and proofreading proposals.

Group faculty/staff meetings that are organized by areas of interest give RAs the opportunity to learn about research in specific areas, which can lead to more focused funding searches and possibly to interdisciplinary or interdepartmental collaborations. Other ideas: keep all parties apprised of funding shifts, interests and policy updates by hosting an annual or sponsor-specific faculty/RA meeting(s). Occasionally personalize the information with an office visit, as emails can get lost or may not be read and this face-to-face interaction may aid in the retention of information and follow through.

Ideas that save time are always welcomed and they should benefit RAs, faculty and/or the department. Within the department, create an internal list of RAs and the sponsored accounts and faculty they serve. A simple spreadsheet that is accessible to all departmental RAs that contains faculty NSF IDs and NIH eRA Commons login, for example, can not only save time, but can alleviate any extra requests to the PI, allowing them to focus their time and effort on grant writing. This information should be kept in a common, yet secured folder accessible to all departmental specific RAs. Include areas of research interest and other items and information that may be relevant to the researcher.

**Collaborations**

Collaborations can be created when RAs attend local, regional or national professional development workshops and conferences. Meeting RAs, within or outside the institution, who work with researchers with the same general or specific areas of interest, could lead to introductions and possible future proposal partnerships. Also, keeping abreast of significant sponsor awards and funding priorities by watching webinars, viewing PowerPoint presentations, and reviewing sponsor websites on a regular basis can lead to introductions for future partnerships. These developing relationships can grow into collaborations on multi-institutional or multi-disciplinary proposals that tend to be favored by federal sponsors. The RA can be a conduit to bringing together faculty and institutions.

**University**

Whether it is proposal preparation, award management or answering departmental inquiries, the RA is the resource for pre- and post-award knowledge and support for faculty and colleagues. Developing policies and procedures and creating systems that make an RA’s workload simpler will
allow more time for meeting personal, departmental and university goals. Consider consolidating information into one document for easy access, implementing reporting systems that meet specific needs, or identifying experts in a particular area.

When an answer is needed, look within the organization for seasoned professionals who are knowledgeable in the area for which expertise is sought. By asking a colleague who is skilled in a respective area, answers can be found with minimal effort. Implementing new systems within the organization will usually result in a few individuals who become specialists in the system. Tap into their proficiency and learn the “ins and outs” of the program to make the workload and systems user friendly and as uncomplicated as possible. Share the names and areas of expertise of these skilled professionals with all university stakeholders. By creating a university-wide document that provides contact and knowledge-based information for all RAs to access, the success of sponsored projects can be improved as this simple list can save time and provide valuable information to everyone in the university. At university-wide staff meetings, introduce those individuals with specific knowledge that is related to research advancement, both in the pre- and post-award areas. Working as a team can create a sense of unity and purpose for achieving departmental and university research goals.

Take advantage of specialized units within the department and/or university to better understand a specific subject. Invite representatives to participate or present at staff meetings to provide explanations of their services; this will build a relationship between the unit and staff, as having a contact person often makes future inquiries easy. In many instances, the same information is used by different departments in different ways. Understanding how other departments use and disseminate the same or similar unit specific information can open doors that were never thought of previously by the RA or department.

Although policies and procedures are standard throughout the university, it is not uncommon for college or departmental procedures, systems and best practices to vary. Departmental leadership often creates certain systems/documents specific to their area(s), which is used to track or maintain information for the success of that department. Share ideas and documents with other departments to streamline the workload. This leads to the university being consistent with its best practices.

As an institution’s research advancement needs evolve, so does its need to update, improve or create new systems, procedures and documents. Ask people from various departments that have different types of RA-related experience to participate in round table meetings so they can share the best practices from their respective departments using the best ideas to implement the appropriate action. Varying levels of skills and knowledge can be helpful to a successful implementation.

The best way for RAs to help each other and their institution is to actively participate in the various events and meetings offered at the department, college or university level. Problems can be identified and solutions generated by sharing experiences and ideas with one another. Tap into the knowledge base of colleagues and faculty. Current and past situations can be the best learning experiences for providing the best customer service. To serve faculty with the best customer service, the RA needs to begin to tap into the resources available – each other, fellow Research Administrators.

Julie Castro, Research Advancement Administrator for Electrical, Computer, and Energy Engineering (ECEE) at Arizona State University has been providing pre-award services to faculty for four years. Previously, she served as PI and Director for a community-based outreach program at the University of Arizona, where she gained her pre-award and administrative experience. She can be reached at julie.castro@asu.edu.

Research Administration... By the NUMBERS

$21,314,000,000…
the NIH total budget amount for Research Grants in FY11.

108…
The current Carnegie classification for RU/VH’s lists this many institutions – there are...

33…
different classifications.

$115,268,000…
Total Social Science R&D expenditures at the University of Michigan-Ann Arbor, number...

1…
on the NSF FY10 HERD Survey.

29%…
Sub-Saharan African countries received this percentage of United States foreign economic assistance.

19…
U.S. government agencies funded foreign assistance activities in FY11.

$57,000,000,000…
According to a AAAS analysis, the amount budget sequestration would cut R&D by through 2017.

7…
Number of Universities Patrick Green (Vanderbilt University, being the current) has worked at, all in Region 3.

Want to share numbers? Email Derek Brown at derekbrown@wsu.edu
One of the most rewarding parts of attending PRA and AM is seeing old friends from other predominantly undergraduate institutions (PUIs) and getting to know colleagues from research-intensive institutions. In interacting with research administrators from larger campuses, I’ve frequently found myself explaining what it’s like to work at a PUI and how it’s different from working at a research-intensive institution. These conversations and those with colleagues new to PUIs highlight what those of us who’ve long been in the PUI world know well and sometimes take for granted. Members of the PUI community talk among themselves through lively email exchanges throughout the year and at sessions at NCURA meetings; common themes emerge, some of which are surprising to colleagues outside of PUIs. It’s fairly well known that we must be generalists and prioritize our large range of responsibilities. Less well known is that we relate differently to our faculty members and devote time and energy to building relationships with them, in part because of the smaller scale of our campuses, and especially because of the nature of our institutions. Research administrators at PUIs are engaged with faculty throughout the entire process, from refining project ideas and identifying funding sources through proposal development and final submission, all with the goal of making our faculty successful in their grant-seeking efforts and in their professional lives overall, as well as advancing our institutional missions by increasing grant competitiveness. Here are some examples of the ways in which those of us at PUIs support our faculty and work resolutely on their behalf.

Jeffrey Ritchie (personal communication, January 24, 2013), Director of Sponsored Programs at Lewis University, is new to PUIs and is experiencing some of the differences first hand. Before arriving at Lewis in the spring of 2012, Jeff had been the grants manager for Aurora Health Care, a non-profit healthcare system in Wisconsin with more than 30,000 employees spread across sixteen hospitals. Prior to that he worked in the central sponsored programs office at the University of Cincinnati College of Medicine. Jeff notes that, “with this background in navigating very large organizations, I was really not prepared for the ‘intimacy’ of daily life at a PUI and..."
Attending my first... few NCURA meetings proved how much knowledge you could glean from volunteers—people just like me! At that point, the question wasn’t when but how I would get involved.

Being close to DC, I volunteered as an audience participant in the televised workshops. I joined the pre-award neighborhood committee, chaired it, graduated from the LDI program, chaired the Neighborhood Program Committee, and was on the Professional Development Committee. I worked the registration desk and NCURA store.

Each activity I participated in made me realize the different ways you can give back to NCURA. I went down different paths—volunteer, presenter, and leader. I can’t pick just one. They were all fun and involved a great group of people.

Holly Benze is the Director of Research Projects Administration at Johns Hopkins University. She can be reached at hab@jhu.edu
since it was created 16 years ago. Throughout the years of the office’s growth, he has focused on “developing and sustaining quality relationships with faculty and mid-level administrators seeking external support.” Many research administrators at PUIs believe, as Martin does, that “paying attention to where someone is in their career, where their research or other projects stand, and the level of their project leadership experience are some of the reasons for the successes we have achieved in both increasing the amount of external support received but also the variety and quality of projects that are undertaken.” Across the breadth of his work with faculty, “building relationships has opened the door for good responses to difficult advice, to well received education, training and re-training, to commiserating about unwelcome decisions and celebrating successes together,” all of which supports faculty members in developing and sustaining meaningful professional lives.

Another means through which research administrators at PUIs strive toward “leveling the playing field” for faculty members is through active involvement in proposal development. We often provide our faculty with proposal outlines or templates or secure samples of successful applications when possible. Many colleagues, such as Barbara Gray (personal communication, January 29, 2013), Director of Sponsored Programs and Research Administration at Valdosta State University, provide editorial assistance for faculty, a topic on which she’s led well-attended sessions at national and regional meetings. Barbara knows that “faculty from PUIs compete with faculty from research powerhouses, [so] making a very positive first impression is imperative. A sponsored programs office that can assist the PI in submitting a well-written, error-free proposal contributes to increased likelihood of funding success.” Also, “PIs struggling with page limitations also appreciate the fact that a well-edited document is almost always shorter than the original version.” Similarly, Pamela Napier (personal communication, January 28, 2013), Director of Sponsored Programs at Agnes Scott College, uses skills she developed as a high school English teacher and a magazine editor to help faculty members polish their proposals. “I find most writers are very confident about the subject/verb agreement errors and dangling modifiers.” Both Barbara and Pamela make concerted efforts to develop relationships with faculty before the pressure of a proposal deadline gets in the way; and, as Barbara observes, it’s important to “build credibility with PIs through commitment, expertise, and a non-critical approach.” As many of us at PUIs do, Pamela begins building a relationship before the faculty member is hired by meeting candidates at the interview stage and letting them know the College offers help with all aspects of proposal writing and grant management.

The relationships we build with faculty also aid in communicating about and ensuring compliance. Roberta Truscello (personal communication, January 29, 2013) spent several years at The College of New Jersey (a PUI), followed by six years at Cornell University, and is now Director of Sponsored Programs at Hobart and William Smith Colleges (a PUI). She recently observed, “Sometimes when working with faculty on compliance issues I am reminded of the opening line of Anna Karenina: ‘All happy families are alike; each unhappy family is unhappy in its own way.’ When a new compliance program is rolled out, there is a definite movement toward unhappiness.” Whereas faculty members at larger institutions tend to expect numerous policies related to various areas of compliance, their counterparts at PUIs may question new requirements that affect their grant-seeking. Consequently, Roberta has “spent a lot of time researching and making sure I can articulate the rationale for the directives and regulations that I’m constantly referring to. There is not much time to do this one-on-one at larger institutions, but if you can distill some of the basic reasons for the various compliances into simple fact sheets, or just have some nice clear language ready to use when an opportunity presents itself, it can be very helpful.” Being able to take an individualized approach to explaining compliance issues, building on experiences with other faculty members, and keeping the bigger picture in mind when educating faculty about compliance lead to more success in implementing policies.

After many years as the Director of Sponsored Programs at the University of Nebraska at Kearney, John Falconer (personal communication, January 24, 2015) recently moved into the role of Director of the Honors Program and Undergraduate Research & Creative Activity at UNK and reflected on his experiences as a research administrator at a PUI. “In sponsored programs, I like the never-ending variety of activities. We don’t specialize in one agency, or one academic field. We can easily switch from an NSF chemistry proposal to a linguist thinking about a proposal to the National Endowment for the Humanities. We go from budget approval to program development. We move from conducting a workshop for new faculty to meeting with congressional representatives. While the diversity of functions is a challenge, it offers multiple pressure points to affect the system.”

Especially in the ways faculty focus their scholarship and thus their grant-seeking, John sees PUIs as having a different culture than larger institutions. “Faculty at PUIs may be national-level researchers, but they are committed to integrating their scholarship into the undergraduate experience. Importantly, while they may have the ability to do ‘Big Money Research,’ they may opt against it if it would threaten their interaction with students.” These two aspects lead to great satisfaction for many research administrators in smaller institutions. John summarizes this: “In a PUI sponsored programs office, you are connected to people throughout the institution and your work ties into the mission in multiple ways. Some people like working on next-generation technology; I like supporting next-generation scholars.”

Indeed, many of us who work at PUIs wouldn’t want to work in other kinds of environments. We value the quality of the relationships we have on our campuses, the more personalized nature of work we do, and the ability to see readily the effects of our efforts on the lives of faculty and students.

1 More about Kendra’s approach to faculty grant readiness may be found in this document from a workshop she and Kelly DeFanti from Lewis & Clark College did at their regional meeting in 2012: http://www.ogrd.wsu.edu/fnccura/2012ProgramMaterials/SPA_Guerilla%20Grant%20Development_04172012.pdf

2 See also John Falconer, “A Context for Extramural Funding at State Comprehensive Universities: Tilting at Windmills or Fighting the Good Fight?” Teacher-Scholar: The Journal of the State Comprehensive University, Volume 1, Number 1, Summer 2009, pp. 44-54. Accessible at http://www.ibsu.edu/teacher-scholar/previous/volume1/johns/page1.html

Sally J. Southwick is the associate director of the Office of Sponsored Projects and Research at Keene State College. She is a member of the PUI community committee and has worked in both private and public PUIs. She is deeply grateful to the colleagues who contributed to this article and who strengthen the PUI community. You may contact her at ssouthwick@keene.edu.
I have been part of NIH’s electronic Research Administration (eRA) team for just over a year now. A year… 12 months, 52 weeks, 365 days, 8766 hours, 525949 minutes, 31556940 seconds (give or take). Do you know how much of the grant process I understand? About 10%, maybe. If I’m generous.

About 10%... I have a Master’s in Science Education and a Bachelor’s in Physics. I’m not stupid, but this stuff is complicated! And during the last year, while working with wonderful and amazing people, one pearl of wisdom continues to ring true to me. It was told to me by a now dear colleague and friend just a few days after taking the position of Communication Specialist. Carolyn said that one of the things she liked about working here is that “Everyone swims in the same direction.”

I love the imagery, but what does that mean? Quite simply, everyone here has the same goal: to successfully support the process of funding biomedical research. To make a positive contribution to humankind. To turn discovery into health. To help.

Let me share some observations of how NIH’s Office of Extramural Research (OER) and the eRA team have implemented some exciting changes to help the investigators and research administrators achieve their goals.

1. Assist – One of the most ambitious undertakings this past year has been the launch of ASSIST (Application Submission System & Interface for Submission Tracking) under the direction of Sheri Cummins. ASSIST has been created to accommodate the electronic submission of multi-project (also sometimes referred to as ‘complex’) applications. Multi-project applications represent less than 10% of the applications that NIH receives. However, due to their vast scope and, yes, complexity, these applications can be very labor intensive for the applicants to develop, especially in the paper environment. The paper applications are also particularly cumbersome for NIH staff and reviewers to handle once they get to NIH.

ASSIST is built to handle the wide variety of ways in which people work together to assemble these types of applications. It allows multiple users to work in the system at once (on different forms) – even users from different institutions (yeah, that’s cool). It provides access controls to the applicant organization so they can grant permissions to work on individual components, or even restrict them to budget/non-budget information (I would classify that as helpful). ASSIST also accommodates many features that have been on our applicants’ electronic submission wish list for years (see, we listen): ASSIST checks the application against most NIH and Grants.gov business rules **before** submission (way helpful!). And the system will assemble a full and complete application image as it will be seen by reviewers before submission ((speechless))!

NIH was very careful to use existing processes and accounts to minimize disruption for our users, working hand in hand with Grants.gov as we built the system. This allows our applicants who currently submit applications to Grants.gov via system-to-system solutions to continue to do so. ASSIST allows your existing Grants.gov Authorized Organizational Representatives (AOR) to use their Grants.gov credentials when they hit the submit button in ASSIST. Finally, anyone with an eRA Commons account can use ASSIST (although only someone with AOR credentials can submit an application). We even built ASSIST as a stand-alone system in hopes that Grants.gov might be able to leverage some of our work as they look to move towards online applications. It’s still early in the development process, however. We are still in the pilot phase of the transition to using ASSIST for all of NIH’s multi-project applications.
2. eRA Commons — Customer Relationship Manager Scarlett Gibb is the force behind eRA Commons. The Commons is a huge endeavor and continues to grow by requests from the user community and by the goals set forth at NIH to move to fully electronic grants administration. In the short time that I have been here, new functionality has been introduced to improve many aspects of grant management and reporting. To name some of these functions, we now have electronic submission of Financial Conflicts of Interest (FCOI), Change of Institution/Relinquishing Statement (Type 7s), and Administrative Supplements (Type 3s).

There is the “LikeThis” search tool that helps investigators find similar NIH funded projects to the one they are considering, and enhancements to xTrain. And these are just the “big ticket” items. However, the biggest ticket item has been the addition of electronic submission of Research Performance Progress Report (RPPR) to eRA Commons. RPPR is a federally mandated standardized reporting procedure that all federally-funded research projects will be required to use. eRA Commons has piloted and implemented the RPPR module for all Streamlined Non-Completing Award Process (SNAP) and Fellowships. The plan is to retire the eSNAP functionality in the foreseeable future. The hope is to implement all progress reporting to RPPR by the end of the year.

3. eRA Help Desk — In October the eRA Help Desk led by User Support Branch Chief Dave Hunter, launched a new online Help Desk Ticketing System. The new system has been customized to meet your needs so that the Help Desk folks can better respond to your request. The interface includes automated emails with meaningful and helpful information; drop-down menus configured for the many specific features and functions found in eRA Commons that allow you to quickly and specifically define your issue; Global Alerts so you will know if others are experiencing the same issue; historical data that is retained for easy follow up; and much more.

4. Web page enhancements — You might have caught my November Items of Interest article about the OER updated web pages. The new look improves the navigation of the pages and provides critical information on the OER home page in the information carousel.

And not to be left out of the fun, eRA added a new training page to its repertoire. Organized by content, the training page is divided into four areas: eRA Commons, Internet Assisted Review (IAR), xTrain, and newly added ASSIST. Within each area, you will find resources to help you. Those resources can include videos, tutorials, recorded webinars, Power Point presentations, Word documents, and PDF documents. All there, all for you. Just a click away.

5. Follow the question mark for help — If you use the new ASSIST system and click on the question mark next to the screen title, you may be pleasantly surprised. We have created online help information to guide you, accessible right from those screens. This is thanks to a new documentation tool acquired recently by the eRA Communications and Documentation shop. Moreover, while the help files spell out how to use the system, they also include policy references that link to the appropriate section of the application guide — so both policy and process are available in one place for the user. The tool also allows single sourcing of content, which means that as language changes in user guides, help files in the system will automatically adjust. We are excited about this new direction for documentation and the integrated experience it offers to users. We recently completed the help files for xTrain, so check that out once you get a chance!

The changes do not stop there. In the coming year the plans are many and challenging. You will start to see some significant new changes in the eRA Commons, bringing a modern and appealing look to the interface with a friendly and streamlined profile system. And, of course, we will continue to incorporate user feedback into our systems as resources allow.

Pretty impressive, if you ask me. These endeavors focus on one ultimate goal: To help achieve the mission of NIH which is to “seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce the burdens of illness and disability.” Let me repeat that again — To help.*

Links to Resources:

ASSIST: https://public.era.nih.gov/assist/
eRA Commons: https://public.era.nih.gov/commons/
Financial Conflicts of Interest: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/coi/
Administrative Supplements (Type 3s): http://era.nih.gov/commons/faq_commons.cfm#XVIII
LikeThis: http://era.nih.gov/services_for_applicants/like_this/likethis.cfm
Change of Institution/Relinquishing Statement: http://era.nih.gov/commons/faq_commons.cfm#XIX
xTrain: http://era.nih.gov/training/program/index.cfm
eRA Help Desk: http://era.nih.gov/HELP/
OER home page: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/oe.htm
November Items of Interest: http://era.nih.gov/news_and_events/era_item_11-16-12.cfm
eRA Training: http://era.nih.gov/era_training/index.cfm
Internet Assisted Review (IAR): http://era.nih.gov/era_training/iar.cfm

Joe Schumaker is an eRA Communications Specialist for the Office of Extramural Research. Relatively new to the OER family, Joe joined the team in November 2011. Previously, Joe was the Director of Services for a small IT consulting company based out of Decatur, GA. As such, he travelled extensively around the country and Canada implementing, consulting on, and customizing a communications and collaborative solution called FirstClass. Formerly, he was a high school Physics and Oceanography teacher in south Florida. He holds a Bachelor’s Degree in Physics from Stetson University and a Master’s of Science Education from the University of Florida. He can be reached at joseph.schumaker@nih.gov.
Even as a pre-award manager at a predominantly undergraduate institution, Carol Porter rarely has a day of boredom. “We don’t ever get to just sit around and watch TV and eat bonbons,” she might say. “Between deadlines and working with faculty and our office’s outreach efforts, most days I don’t finish my work until late, and I oftentimes eat lunch while working at my desk or while walking across campus to a meeting.”

Regardless of the position, the role, the office or one’s institution type, finding time for reflection would likely be a stretch for most research administrators, and unfortunately, this lack of time—coupled with the constant transition from one thing to another in our world of multi-tasking—can take a toll on even the best of us. The good news: Reflection is not only good for recharging your batteries; it can also help you make the most of your career. Developing a reflective practice isn’t a difficult or magical process. In fact, many of us probably already use some elements in our daily lives. When put together in a way that makes sense (the reflective cycle), these pieces become a powerful tool for emotional and professional well-being.

The reflective cycle, as outlined by Graham Gibbs in 1988, is fairly well-known and is utilized and adapted by many across many disciplines to help people think more critically about specific incidents, asking what happened, why it happened, what could have been done to be more effective and what could be done to improve. Studies show that this act of looking backward can change not only a person’s understanding of that past incident, but improve future decision-making (Galvez-Martin, 2003).

The cycle begins with a reflective stance and a willingness to question and take a critical look at our beliefs and theories (Serafini, 2002). For the research administrator, this can include broad categories of introspection and inquiry on what we believe, not only about ourselves, but also about what we believe about our work and how we do it. Do our theories and beliefs match our actions? Are we walking the walk and talking the talk?

This first step in the cycle takes time, which is at a premium for most research administrators. We’re all overloaded with work and our other commitments. Who has time to think about and consider these deep thoughts? Try this: Before you start a new activity take 30 seconds to reflect and ask yourself, “What did I just do?” and “What did it mean?” These seconds of taking stock can be beneficial to your emotional health. It will help your brain reset and prepare for the next thing, providing you with a moment of calm so you can mentally let go of the last action and prepare for the next one (Stains, 2012).

From this place of thoughtfulness and reflection you move to the second step, which is to assess your work practices and work behaviors. How would you describe your work product? Are you achieving the results you want? Does your behavior connect back to how you see yourself as a professional research administrator?

During your assessment, it helps if you can bring some distance to your perspective. Being objective about yourself may not be the easiest thing to do, but if you can approach it like you would a problem you observe in a co-worker or friend, it may be easier. What are the problems here? How would others (your family, your co-workers, your peers, your faculty members, your supervisor) describe you and your work?

Having feedback loops available to you can create a valuable dialogue here. Hearing not only your
Here’s an Easy Reflective Activity to Get You Started:

Take a few minutes to make a list of the qualities of a good research administrator. You can fill in your own job title here if it helps. Be thoughtful and contemplative. What qualities would you want to find in someone you were going to hire for that position? Once you’ve gotten your thoughts committed to paper, go back through your list and circle all of the attributes on the list that you think you exhibit in your role at your institution. Done with that? Now put a check beside each one that you think your supervisor would say he or she sees in you. If you have direct reports, repeat this step for each of them. Think about your “customers.” Would any of these qualities come to mind for them when describing you? If so, put a star beside each one. Go back through the list and note which items don’t have many stars or checks and may or may not be circled.

Now, take each of these features and write a description for each of them. Maybe being punctual is one the ones you’re not especially known for. What sets a punctual person apart? It’s true that a punctual person is on time, yes, but on a deeper level, are there other things out there that distinguish a punctual person? Write these down. Ask yourself what it would be like to be this attribute, to be seen or thought of as having this attribute. In your mind’s eye, what would it look like to you? Take that vision and write it down.

Next, how would you know if you already had this feature of a good research administrator? What would be the proof if people were going to accuse you of being a habitually punctual person? What evidence would they bring? Write these things down.

Lastly, let’s assume for a minute that you decide that you want to strive for this attribute; you want to be a punctual person. Keep the vision that you’ve set in your mind as well as the evidence needed to prove that you’ve been successful as you write down two or three specific and concrete steps. If you need help coming up with these, go back to the list of what sets that person apart and begin to tear some of those apart.

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Research administration, much like the research faculty members conduct, is collaborative. Don’t pass up an opportunity to meet with other research administrators to share and learn together. NCURA is a valuable place to make these connections if you don’t already have them at your institution, and there is a myriad of ways to “get connected.”

The third step in the reflective cycle involves planning and preparation. This is where you will begin to set specific benchmarks and goals. Maybe during your reflection you discovered a misalignment of your personal and professional goals. What’s the best way to get these back into proper alignment? What would your day, your office, your desk, your files and even your schedule look like if everything were going as it should be? How would you feel? As you plan and prepare, keep in mind what you want the final product to be.

Chip Dodd (2001) writes that all too often we end up doing things (our jobs) so we can have something (a nice house) so we can be something (successful). Instead we should start with who we are, then move on to what we do that expresses who we are, and then finally what we have as a result of that authentic expression of who we are. What would be the result of an authentic expression of who you are?

Having a preferred vision of who we are and what we are working toward is essential for success in this step of the cycle. This vision will change as you grow and as your understanding of yourself and the world around you changes. What would this idealized life or work-life look like?

Once you’ve described the outcomes you’d like to see, decide how you’ll know when you get there. What are the hallmarks of this new situation or this new you? Are you happier? Is your desk neater? Are your customer service surveys out of this world? Are faculty comments glowing? What are the things that would prove to both you and others that you had truly achieved the outcome? Just remember that our ability to achieve our goals oftentimes depends on how well we have articulated what success looks like. Take your goals and your preferred vision and write them down.

Now you’re ready to start making your to-do lists. Believe it or not, tons of people want to start here. They’re so ready to fix the problem, that they jump right to the list; unfortunately, they don’t even know what the problem is yet. You do. Make your list as thoughts come to you. You can reorganize and prioritize later. Spend a lot of time here. You want your list to be exhaustive.

The final step is to implement your plan. Take the things on your list and start incrementally applying them to your life. You will be surprised. Inevitably, you will arrive back where you started, at the reflective stance, so that you can begin the reflective cycle again. Before you know it, you will have made this a part of your daily practice.

REFERENCES

Sam Gannon, Ed.D., Education and Training Manager at Vanderbilt University in Nashville. He began working in program management of federal grants more than 18 years ago and research administration seven years ago. He is an alumn of NCURA’s Executive Leadership Program Class of 2012. He is actively involved in NCURA, serving on the editorial board of Research Management Review and leading numerous workshops and sessions at regional and national conferences as well as FRA and PRA. He directs the Vanderbilt Program in Research Administration Development, which is a multi-tiered institutional certification program that encompasses pre- and post-award activities for grants, contracts and gifts, institutional compliance and support as well as the responsible conduct of research. He can be reached at sam.gannon@vanderbilt.edu.
Building a Supportive Compliance Environment

By Jane Burns

The University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture (UTIA) compliance officer position is a new position, established in 2011. This article explores how the approach to this position has improved our compliance system and details an effective tool we have used, a monthly Lunch and Learn compliance training series.

A Positive Approach to the Compliance Officer Position

Because our campus has an especially strong focus on facilitating and supporting faculty members, this position emphasizes service, communication, and education. Built into the job description is promoting awareness, educating and advising the campus community, and facilitating communication between offices with roles in research compliance. Having an audit background, I have a clear understanding of the importance of compliance – from an institutional standpoint, as well as a standpoint of protecting our employees. But equally helpful, in my past experiences with people in charge of compliance, I learned that a heavy-handed “Gestapo” approach often backfires; employees in that environment tend to close off communication and hide potential compliance problems. That method would be especially ineffective in a research institution, where federal laws and regulations must be reconciled with the concept of unrestricted academic freedom.

The compliance officer position was established as a part of the Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP), which puts me in a great position to know about projects on our campus and to communicate with faculty members. Every proposal, contract, award, material transfer agreement, confidentiality agreement, invention disclosure, and other document that passes through the office offers a chance for me to learn about projects – and potential compliance concerns – and to educate and inform our project leaders about what they need to do. Because I’m part of the OSP staff, the grant coordinators and director regularly bring compliance issues to my attention, and I regularly let them know about new issues. It helps, too, that our OSP is involved early in the proposal process, allowing early detection of possible activity needing my involvement. This set-up facilitates the backbone of our compliance system – communication with and education of our faculty members. It provides me opportunities every day to work one-on-one with researchers, so that I can learn about possible risks and educate them about compliance. In addition to providing opportunities to connect with researchers and make the compliance officer more approachable, being in the OSP has other advantages. For instance, it helps bring together parties needed to develop or amend campus procedures or university policies. Recently, the director of OSP, who was working with our research foundation, brought to my attention a foreign visitor who was not on my radar. Ultimately, this highlighted the need for a university-wide policy on visiting scholars, which is now in the
Jamie Caldwell’s Desk

Glad you asked!

As many of us are aware, our research faculty are under extreme pressure to obtain extramural funding. The result is this increased environment of compliance, fiscal or regulatory. The expectation is that all faculty (and research staff) engaged in research must meet certain training requirements. Whether it is the Responsible Conduct of Research Training (RCR), Financial Conflict of Interest (FCOI), IACUC or IRB training, keeping track of it all has become a burdensome task.

At my institution we have formed a committee which includes various stakeholders to collect data and provide a formal recommendation to our Information Technology Group who will be charged with creating a “One Stop Shop” Portal for all Research Training.

Our goal is to have this project completed within the next six months.

Jamie Caldwell is Director, Office of Research Services for the Health Sciences, Loyola University Chicago- Health Sciences Division. He can be reached at jcaldw@lumc.edu

Lunch and Learn

In 2012, we began an effective activity suggested by our OSP Director — monthly compliance Lunch and Learn sessions, open to all UTIA faculty, staff, and students. Each month, we cover a different compliance topic, and I send an e-mail invitation to all of our employees in the area. We offer lunch, which not only entices them to come, but also gives them an opportunity to communicate with me as they RSVP. Of course, these sessions provide information and make employees aware of what they need to know about compliance. They also establish an environment that focuses on learning and working together with compliance officers to do the right thing. So far, over 150 employees have attended the sessions, with an average attendance of 32.

I started our Lunch and Learn workshops with an overview of compliance at UTIA — what is “compliance,” what does our university policy say about employees’ responsibilities, and what resources are available to them. This gave the opportunity for people to find out about the new compliance position, why it was established, and what I would be doing. Most importantly, we got to talk face-to-face and start building an open exchange of compliance information.

Our campus compliance officers have been a great resource for the Lunch and Learn sessions. It takes teamwork to build a strong compliance system. Employees in charge of the alphabet of compliance — IRB, IBC, IACUC, to name a few — welcome the opportunity to put their messages in front of researchers. Speaking in this setting helps them do their jobs better because they can teach and also because it encourages two-way communication. The OSP staff, who attend the sessions, also have learned about compliance issues, which helps their awareness about what to bring to our attention as proposals are being routed. Sessions led by our campus compliance officers for specific areas include:

- Director for Animal Compliance Support and IACUC Coordinator — an overview of animal protocols. The Director had not been in her position for long, so this gave a chance for people to meet her.
- IRB Administrator — human subjects in research. She fielded several questions about when things should be taken to her and how long a review would take. In addition, she was able to introduce a new training requirement.
- Biological Safety Officer — an overview of the biosafety program.
- Safety Officer — two sessions, one on general safety and, with help of her new Safety Coordinator, one on lab safety and some changes related to inspections and training.
For a few of the sessions, we focused on Responsible Conduct of Research topics and brought in other university employees to speak. Some of those sessions included:

- **Ethics and conflict of interests** – led by a faculty member who teaches a graduate school class on ethics and has written a book on research ethics. This session was held in September 2012, perfect timing for discussion about the new conflict of interest requirements.

- **Academic misconduct** – led by the University’s Assistant General Counsel. For many of our faculty and staff members, this was the first time they had an opportunity to talk with someone from the Office of General Counsel, and having someone from that level of administration emphasized the importance of the topic, as well as the importance of our employees and their actions.

- **IT security** – led by the Chief Information Security Officer for our system administration. Again, this was the first chance for many of our employees to talk with someone from this system-wide office.

- **Authorship** – led by a UTIA faculty member. This session was well attended by researchers and resulted in good questions and conversations among peers about the topic.

So far, we have brought in one speaker from outside the university – our local FBI special agent, to talk about export control and international travel. She gave an entertaining and informative session, and I believe it is important to have her as a regular, welcome presence on our campus. She will be on campus this spring to lead another session, on a topic she selected — intellectual property protection.

Other upcoming speakers include the Director of our Office of Risk Management, discussing risk management, and our Librarian discussing copyright, open access, and predatory journals. Both of these sessions came as suggestions from employees, following up on compliance issues and questions.

In addition to some basic meeting suggestions — such as getting great, dependable people to help with food, video, and computer set-up — I also recommend the following:

- Get a variety of speakers on various topics, to give exposure to a broad group and provide opportunities to meet more of your employees. Having both internal experts and people from outside your campus emphasizes the importance of compliance and helps develop open exchange of information.

- Keep sessions brief. Ours are one hour each, which is long enough for good discussion but short enough to hold attendees’ attention.

- Provide lunch. This will increase attendance and provide more opportunity for communication. Also, it will show employees that administration considers compliance to be important enough to pay for lunch.

- Video-tape the sessions and post them online. This allows employees who are unable to attend the opportunity to learn. Our library of video and training materials is a valued learning and training resource.

Time sessions to correspond with key changes. As mentioned, some of our workshops were timed when new employees were on board or new policies or procedures could be explained.

- Find a room that accommodates the expected number of your group. The size of our sessions has been good to spread necessary information, while allowing for some questions and conversation. We have our sessions in a room that could accommodate over 50 but is comfortable with our normal attendance of 25 –35.

We have received positive feedback from faculty and staff about the new compliance position, the effectiveness of our approach, and our Lunch and Learn sessions. One of our valued faculty members, Neal Stewart, Ivan Racheff Chair of Excellence and Professor of Plant Sciences, (personal communication, February 9, 2013) has the following to say:

> From a faculty perspective, having a trusted and approachable compliance officer is a huge help. The approachability aspect is huge. If a compliance officer is sequestered in AdministrationLand, and doesn’t reach out to faculty, then he or she will likely feel more distance from the faculty, which won’t help accomplish goals of faculty or administration. Jane’s monthly information lunches are viewed as a service to faculty and staff (and the free lunch doesn’t hurt either), which is one of many things she does that makes her approachable to faculty.

Brian Ranger, Biological Safety Officer, (personal communication, February 9, 2013) sees the new compliance system as a positive, effective part of our campus compliance system. He stated that it helps to have a campus compliance officer who is willing to work “constructively and collaboratively with the safety/compliance programs” and that the “communication network is a valuable resource for our offices.” He also was pleased with the promotion of safety and compliance programs with the Lunch and Learn seminars, saying they “bring in people who may not be interested in learning about safety/compliance otherwise.”

Researchers generally see compliance, regulations, and documentation as necessary evils or even roadblocks to their science. My goal is to facilitate researchers’ work, while protecting the university. I am fortunate to work in an organization that highly values service to the faculty members and supports my focus on education and open communication. I’ve found the best way for me to do my job well is to focus on building relationships with employees and taking every opportunity to educate and assist them – to show them “I’m here to help.”

Jane Burns, CPA, CIA, MPA, serves as Assistant Director and Compliance Officer of the University of Tennessee Institute of Agriculture (UTIA) OSF, where she has worked since 2009. Her background includes independent consulting for non-profit organizations, plus 20 years’ experience in auditing and accounting. Jane’s current responsibilities include implementing compliance programs, assisting with policy development, and sponsored programs administration. She can be reached at janeburns@utk.edu.
NCURA’s Traveling Workshops head to Seattle
June 10-12, 2013

Expand and enhance your job knowledge! Learn from well-respected senior research administrators and meet others who share similar job challenges. Choose from:

Financial Research Administration Workshop
- The inter-relationship between pre and post-award financial research administration
- Costing elements in OMB Circular A-21
- Cash management issues
- Issues relating to service centers
- Close-out requirements
- Audits

Level I: Fundamentals of Sponsored Project Administration Workshop
- For the newcomer (less than 2 years experience) or for the individual who has worked primarily in only one area of sponsored projects administration
- Provides participants with a broad overview of the various aspects involved in sponsored projects administration
- Compliance Issues
- Preparation and review of proposals
- Negotiation and acceptance of awards
- Financial and administrative management
- Close-out and audit

Level II: Sponsored Projects Administration Workshop – Critical Issues in Research Administration
- For more experienced research administrators
- Institutional compliance responsibilities
- Proposal creation, budgeting and award administration
- Contract and subaward review
- Export controls
- Post award financial administration

Registration and hotel information is available at www.ncura.edu
Two PIs are having lunch at the campus food court. One is wearing a tee shirt, Chaco’s, and has a backpack at his feet. The other is wearing a tie, has a suit coat over the back of his chair, and a briefcase at his feet. Most of us can tell which PI is from the Law School. PIs from different disciplines embody distinct traits, but they also have several traits in common. PIs, almost by definition, have some traits that transcend any single discipline, and if we as Research Administrators are wise, we will allow these traits to creep into our discipline as well. If we act more like a PI, we will be more successful.

1. **PIs are Mentors:** Regardless of discipline, PIs are usually expected to teach. Sometimes a PI may focus their efforts on teaching 101 level courses to freshmen while others may focus on graduate students and postdocs. Regardless of the mentee, PIs spend a significant amount of time and energy mentoring the next generation of their discipline. We should, too.

To be more successful Research Administrators, we should also be mentors. There are those natural opportunities for a supervisor to mentor a subordinate, but most mentoring opportunities present themselves in less formal ways. For most of us, there is at least one person in our office or organization with less experience who could use a friendly face to go to for advice. Opening ourselves to this type of mentoring opportunity will help others grow professionally and ultimately improve the quality of our offices as a whole.

Another mentoring opportunity we can seize is mentoring faculty. We know research administration is becoming increasingly complex by the day and funding is getting harder and harder to come by. It is very important to remember we are as much an expert in our discipline as PIs are in theirs. We have knowledge to share. By investing the time to teach our PIs to navigate the research administration world, they will become more successful, which is one of our primary goals as Research Administrators.

Perhaps the most beneficial part of mentoring is how the process pushes us to better understand what we will be teaching. It’s cliché, but the best way to learn truly is by teaching others. When others rely on us for guidance, we are forced not only to know the material, but to also convey it to someone else, and we will find ourselves brushing up on topics we already know like the back of our hand. Reinforcing knowledge and translating it to someone else will make us invaluable resources for our institutions.

When PIs are mentoring future PIs, they’re responsible not only to teach existing knowledge,
Collaboration within our own institution also has benefits. Too often we work in silos without collaborating with our own peers. If we are in a central research office, seeking input from departmental staff can be valuable, and vice versa. Departmental staff in an area like Psychology can collaborate with staff in other area like Biology. The disciplines are very different, but the compliance and accounting functions are the same. Collaboration can facilitate the day-to-day work.

A PI mentors students and postdocs, innovates in their own research, and collaborates with others to solve more complicated problems. What is the next step? They become leaders in their field, and we should, too.

### 4. PIs are Leaders:

Becoming an AAAS fellow or National Academy member are some of the highest achievements a PI could aspire to. In order to receive such recognition, a PI must have made significant achievements that advance their discipline. Simply put, they must be a leader in their field. In research administration, we too can strive for high achievements and become leaders in our own right. Perhaps our goal could be to join the prestigious group of Certified Research Administrators (CRA) or even to earn NCURA’s highest honor, the “Outstanding Achievement in Research Administration” Award. Obviously, the pathways to becoming a leader as a PI compared to a Research Administrator are quite different, but embarking on the journey is something both should do.

All disciplines must have individuals who are willing to step up and work to advance their discipline. There are many opportunities to be a leader within the research administration community. We might step into a role like chairing a committee within our region, or perhaps a more ambitious role, such as serving as our region’s Treasurer or Chairperson. For some of us, there are leadership opportunities on a national scale through organizations like the COGR or FDP. While our PIs are serving on the National Science Board we, too, should be looking to become a leader and to make a difference within our own, very important role in research.

### 5. PIs are Human:

While it might be hard to believe, PIs are people, too. No matter what we do for an occupation, remembering the human element will always make us more successful. Building relationships with our PIs will serve both of us well. Perhaps the easiest way to spark this relationship is to simply ask, “What are you working on?” I’ve never met a PI who didn’t like talking about their work and didn’t show visible passion when doing so. By expressing interest in their work, a bond is made and a relationship is started.

Along with relationship building, a critical part of the human element is building trust. A PI once described how their proposal was like their child. They had been nurturing a proposal for months or sometimes years, but at the end, they are forced to turn it over to someone they may not know. It is like dropping a child off at a daycare we have never visited. But, if we have forged a relationship and established trust with our PIs, the entire process from submission through closeout will be much smoother. This human component is critical and a benefit to the PI and the Research Administrator.

Mentors, innovators, collaborators, leaders, and human are all traits of a successful PI. These same traits will make us successful Research Administrators as well. Mentoring others helps us learn and grow professionally. Innovating processes in our offices will streamline work and increase efficiency. Collaborating with our colleagues around the country or across the hall will help find answers to our questions and solve problems we are facing. Becoming a leader allows us to make a bigger impact on our campus, our profession, and even the world. Being human, showing compassion, and establishing trust will make us more successful in everything we do.

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David Smelser, CRA is a Sponsored Programs Administrator at The University of Tennessee – Knoxville and has worked for nine years in various university research settings, from the laboratory to the university’s Office of Research. His primary roles include proposal development and administering awards from a variety of sponsors. He can be reached at dsmelser@utk.edu.

Miriam Campo is the Director of the Office of Sponsored Programs at the University of Tennessee – Knoxville and a long time NCURA member. She has over 25 years of experience in research administration. Miriam’s responsibilities have included all aspects of pre-award at the central research office level, as well as pre- and post-award for an environmental engineering research center. She can be reached at mcampo@utk.edu.
Greetings from snowy Boston!

“What good is the warmth of summer, without the cold of winter to give it sweetness?”

- John Steinbeck

It sure helps to be looking forward to NCURA’s 55th Annual Meeting Program and all the events that we are able to offer in Washington, DC in the summertime.

For those of you who are planning on taking advantage of the new summer meeting dates, and are considering bringing the whole family, we have some important information for you! You will want to plan early to make sure you get the best prices on airfare!

CAMP NCURA! You may have heard that NCURA has partnered with KiddieCorp to provide children’s programming for your children (ages 6 months to 12 years) Monday – Wednesday, August 5-7 at the Washington Hilton.

KiddieCorp is in its twenty-seventh year of providing high quality children’s programs and youth services to conventions, trade shows, and special events. KiddieCorp has enjoyed a long-term partnership with the American Academy of Pediatrics. Supervised activities appropriate for each age group include exciting themes, arts and crafts, group games, music and movement, story time, and dramatic play, children can make their own choices.

CAMP NCURA and KiddieCorp share the goal to provide your children with a comfortable, safe, and happy experience. As NCURA will be subsidizing this program, the cost for the entire event is $40 per child. Babysitting will also be available through this program on Monday and Tuesday evenings for an additional fee. Registration materials will be are available on the NCURA AM55 website.

And for the adults… we are happy to announce that Sunday evening’s elegant cocktails and dinner will be followed by a visit from our favorites, the Capitol Steps, to kick off our meeting with light-hearted musical comedy and fun.

We’re hoping for some lovely early evening weather for an outdoor reception on Tuesday later followed by a Beach Party celebration complete with live music. We’ll be reminding you to dress accordingly but think flip flops.

The AM55 Program Committee is has been busy planning 35 workshops and over 300 sessions covering all current topics, in several different learning formats, for our members at every level.

Workshop Chairs, Judy Fredenberg, Cathy Snyder, and Craig Reynolds have outdone themselves compiling an extraordinary schedule of excellent topics and top-notch presenters. The number of full-day workshops has grown to accommodate the many requests and recommendations we’ve received for comprehensive coverage of some specifics of research administration. Mainstays such as the fundamentals of both pre-award and post-award and the skills to meet the broad demands of departmental administrators are being updated to address the most recent changes and trends. New full-day workshops include the development and implementation of successful training programs you can offer at your institution, a detailed course on the terminology and process of developing “F and A” rates, a thorough look at the administration of clinical trials, and an expert lesson on the management of NIH training and career awards.

Some of the half –day workshops have been designed to complement each other such as the basic overview of Export Controls in the morning and an advanced workshop including EAR/ITAR/OFAC compliance in the afternoon.

All of the workshops offer an in-depth view from topic experts who bring their knowledge and experiences and share their best practices.
NCURA has identified three distinct volunteer pathways for its members to get involved—presenter, leadership, and volunteer at the regional and/or national level. “Pathways” is intended to inspire and inform NCURA members on how to engage NCURA as a volunteer in any or all of these opportunities. To get involved visit http://collaborate.ncura.edu/VolunteerOpportunities

In the days before...

“Google,” “Tweets,” and, dare I say it, “personal computers,” the importance of joining and getting involved in NCURA became obvious to me, both as a networking tool and informational resource. It wasn’t long before I chose the “Volunteer” Pathway, hoping that opportunities for becoming a presenter and/or leader within NCURA would follow. What I didn’t realize at the time was how “user-friendly” NCURA is, both regionally and nationally, and how welcome I felt when I decided to volunteer. Like so many other colleagues, I started out working behind the scenes, covering the registration desk, stuffing regional meeting packets, etc. Other opportunities to present at meetings and run for Office just followed as a natural extension of my initial assignments. Now that I’m closing in on the next phase of life, I realize that volunteering for NCURA was the single best experience of my professional career.

Franc Lemire is Director, Grants Administration and Compliance at the American Academy of Addiction Psychiatry and Senior Sponsored Programs Specialist at Worcester Polytechnic Institute. He can be reached at franc@aaap.org or flemire@wpi.edu

As our Program Co-chairs, Bruce Morgan and Susan Zipkin, and the entire AM55 Program Committee continue working diligently; our next AM55 Update will spotlight the progress of our Tracks and their Leaders:

- Senior Forums (Kim Moreland and Barbara Cole)
- Biomedical (Tom Wilson and Jamie Caldwell)
- Core Curriculum (Cindy Hope and Toni Lawson)
- Pre-award (Debbie Newton and Robyn Remotigue)
- Post-award (Joe Gindhart, Louise Griffin, Jim Wrenn)
- Predominantly Undergraduate Institutions (Pamela Napier and Jerry Pogatshnik)
- Department/Institutes/Centers (Csilla Csaplar and Heather Offhaus)
- Federal (Jean Feldman and Alex McKeown)
- International (John Carfora, Jim Casey, Annika Glauner)
- Policy and Compliance (Tommy Coggins and Suzanne Rivera)
- Career Skills (Sam Westcott and Michele Codd)
- Workshops (Judy Fredenberg, Cathy Snyder, Craig Reynolds)

Stay tuned…...and get ready for summer!!
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The app is pre-populated with all of your contact information to save you set-up time. Features include:

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- Messages – View your direct messages from fellow members.
- Contacts – Save your contacts directly to your mobile address book. Contact information is automatically updated as your contacts update their information.

For more information,
Contact Stephanie Moore
1015 18th Street NW, Suite 901
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The lure of international research collaborations is becoming an increasingly powerful driving force for not only university researchers but their graduate and undergraduate students as well. But the success of these collaborations requires more than just a plane ticket and a good idea.

The inaugural Global Research Funding Forum: Maximizing Opportunities to Build a Global Research Portfolio, hosted by the University of North Texas, brought together more than 300 representatives from 20 countries, 35 universities and 23 US states to discuss the possibilities and realities, the opportunities and obstacles to providing meaningful international research experiences both in the US and abroad.

Keynoting the forum was NCURA’s own John Carfora, associate provost for research advancement and compliance at Loyola Marymount University. John, along with Jim Casey (University of Texas-San Antonio), served as a co-chair of the National Academy of Science’s 2010 Workshop on Examining Core Elements of International Collaboration. The core elements (cultural differences and nuances; legal issues and agreements; differences in ethical standards; research integrity and the responsible conduct of research; intellectual property; risk management; export controls; and strategies for developing meaningful international collaborations) provided the framework for a morning-long panel discussion and participant dialogue with representatives from US universities with a variety of experiences in facilitating international research collaborations. Panelists from Washington State University, Colorado State University, University of Minnesota, Seton Hall University, and the University of Washington spoke about not only an assortment of funding models for international faculty and student opportunities, but about the importance of globalization for today’s university.

One of the meeting highlights was the opportunity to listen to representatives of countries who presented on global research and exchange opportunities. Participants had the opportunity to learn about programs in our more traditional partners such as Great Britain, Canada, Japan, Germany and France as well as some newer players including Estonia, Chile, Mexico and South Africa. The afternoon sessions provided a wealth of information in a concentrated way.

The Forum’s second day highlighted UNT’s Graduate Global Student Research Competition. Twenty UNT graduate students were selected to present research posters at the competition which was judged by global research and funding experts. Projects ranged from studies on postpartum depression in rural Egypt to the use of music to promote resilience in children living in war-torn countries, and using GIS-based spatial epidemiological modeling to track the spread of West Nile virus.

Toni Shaklee, Assistant Vice President for Research at Oklahoma State University in Stillwater, OK, is a graduate of NCURA’s Leadership Development Institute, serves as a member of the Fundamentals traveling faculty and the NCURA Peer Review team. Toni’s responsibilities at OSU include policy development and implementation, pre-award activities, post-award non-financial activities, and other duties as assigned. She can be reached at toni.shaklee@okstate.edu.
The Incidence and Types of Occupational Role Stress among University Research Administrators


Case Study: Research Administration Training and Compliance at the Department Level for a Predominantly Undergraduate Institution

Case Study: Facilitating the University-wide Research Response to Disasters: The Role of a University Research Office

Book Review: The Immortal Life of Henrietta Lacks

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rSmart
Research Administrators pride themselves on being helpful. It’s what we do. Sometimes, though, we get lost in the weeds of government regulations and policy manuals, and lose sight of the fact that we would all be out of jobs if it weren’t for the research we help facilitate. Case in point: I share the following telephone exchange recently overheard between Prof. Stephen X. Asperated and post-award specialist Ms. Carrie Forward from my institution, Livlonenprosser University.

**Prof. Stephen X. Asperated (PI):** Hello. This is Professor Asperated calling, and I would like to request a cost transfer on my NIH grant. The project number is PGN42545-13.

**Ms. Carrie Forward (ResAdm):** Hi, Professor Asperated. This is Carrie speaking. I am glad to help you. No trouble. We do cost transfers all the time. Can you hold while I grab your file?

**PI:** Sure thing. <10 minutes later, as a Muzak version of Helen Reddy’s *I Am Woman* plays on continuous loop.>

**ResAdm:** Sorry about that, Professor. For some reason, your file was not in its proper location. I was beginning to suspect a flaw in our filing system but, fortunately, someone remembered grabbing a file in an emergency, and guess what? It was yours. It works perfectly as a doorstop in the break room! Now, a cost transfer, right? I have just a few questions. What cost you would like to have transferred?

**PI:** Two orders of Alexa Fluor 594-conjugated secondary antibodies.

**ResAdm:** OK. Well, to conform to OMB A-21, I need to document how these antibodies are allocable to your grant.

**PI:** There’s no reason to be so emphatically effusive, Carrie.


**PI:** Ah, yes. I recall those circulars are important . . . somehow . . . to you folks.

**ResAdm:** Now, how are these antibodies allocable to your grant?

**PI:** A perfectly reasonable thing to ask, Carrie. The grant I am working on is intended to demonstrate whether FGF1/p38 MAP kinase inhibitor treatment after acute myocardial injury in 8- to 10-week-old rats increases cardiomyocyte mitosis. We use the Alexa Fluor 594-conjugated secondary antibodies to detect the immune complexes, and I inadvertently charged them to my discretionary account instead of my NIH grant.

**ResAdm:** Now that’s interesting, Dr. Asperated. I read *Mrs. Frisby and the Rats of NIMH* when I was ten and there wasn’t any mention of FGF1/p38 MAP kinase inhibitor treatment. Could you give me just a bit more information so that I can demonstrate reasonable, allowable, and allocable?

**PI:** <long pause> I see. Well, I guess you caught me. The real story is that I needed to buy some medicine for the widdle bitty baby rats in my study so they wouldn’t feel all yucky.

**ResAdm:** OMG, 125 days?!

**PI:** I’m sorry, Carrie. I simply don’t refer to the circulars enough to remember 125. Which one is it?

**ResAdm:** No, Dr. Asperated, that really was, “O-M-G.” You’ve evidently forgotten NIH’s 90-day cost allocation policy. When it’s over 90 days, research administrators feel all yucky. Why, may I ask, are you only getting around to asking for this cost transfer now?

**PI:** Why, Carrie, I thought you knew. I’ve been on sabbatical at the Max Planck Institute for Heart and Lung Research in Bad Nauheim, Germany, and I didn’t have access to my accounts.

**ResAdm:** Golly, Professor, not being able to review your accounts is no ex-
cuse for not being able to review your accounts. You could have flown back every month. You could have used one of Livlonenprosser’s VPN and accessed those files via remote desktop and six sets of security authentications. And why refer to it as “bad” Nauheim?” Did something awful happen to you there? That’s what happened, isn’t it? I’m always the last to know.

PI: Well, honestly, Carrie, it’s been a terri…

ResAdm: Terrible! I knew it. Let me help you, Professor. I’ll just put on the form here that you were so depressed by your dreary surroundings that you simply couldn’t behave responsibly.

PI: <heavy sigh>

ResAdm: Now, moving on, I also need to know how you are going to prevent this over-90-day request from ever, ever happening again.

PI: Well, to be honest, all I can think to do is agree to review my accounts frequently and ask the staff in my department to figure out a way to make sure I get my statements in a timely fashion.

ResAdm: Professor, I’m not sure you’re taking this seriously. I can’t simply write down that you’ll make a good faith effort to do better. We certainly don’t want the OIG Men in Black to come knocking.

PI: Sigh, Carrie, again, which circular is that?


PI: Umm. I don’t know. How about I put up my first born as collateral against it’s happening again?

ResAdm: Sorry, but A-110 doesn’t give guidance on how to value the in-kind donation of human beings. And, besides, I dated him in high school and know better. Try again.

PI: All right. How about if I promise to severely punish the staff in my department the next time it happens?

ResAdm: I know the staff in your department. They’re already severely punished.

PI: Okay . . . how about if I force them to watch a marathon of TLC’s Here Comes Honey Boo-Boo?

ResAdm: Okie dokie then, I’ll just add that to a sticky note on the form to demonstrate that you mean business. Thanks, Dr. Asperated, I think that takes care of things. But before you go . . . do you know where we might find a cheap doorstop?

PI: Oh, for Pete’s . . . <CLICK!>  

NCURably Pedantic is written by long-standing NCURA members, all under pseudonym protection.
“I would call in a second for help and always keep Huron in mind when looking for support.”

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In addition to Region I ongoing programming, our goals for 2013 include:

- Adding a Secretary-Elect to the officer’s roster, which will require an affirmative vote of at least two-thirds of Region I members
- Updating the administrative policies
- Searching for 2014 sites for the Region I Conference and a Boston-Area conference center for Research Administrator Discussion Groups (RADGs) and local workshops
- Deciding if we will continue to hold the Region I Conference in the spring or move it to the fall

**March/April Region I Programming will include…**

*Surviving an Audit: From Proposal to Closeout*

Boston, MA, Wednesday, March 20

This Research Administrator Discussion Group (RADG) will discuss the types of audits and potential areas of findings that have impacted higher education over the past five years. This panel will include open discussion on the concerns, questions, and confusions of the research administrator who needs to deal with an auditor; internal control failures that have caused many of these findings; and how best to avoid them at your institution. More information:

http://www.ncuraregion1.org/031312radgmeeting.html

**Spring Meeting 2013**

*Working in a World of Grey*

 Wentworth By The Sea Hotel and Spa | New Castle, New Hampshire

Workshops: Monday April 29, 2013 | Conference: Tuesday, April 30-May 2, 2013

A variety of half and full day workshops are being planned for the day before the spring meeting. Possible offerings include: Essentials of Sponsored Research Administration, Financial Compliance/Circulars, Leadership, Excel Part 1 & Excel Part 2, Presentation Skills, Service Centers, Subrecipient Monitoring, and Sponsored Audits. The program committee is also working diligently to organize over forty informative and dynamic concurrent sessions, discussion groups, and panels to be held during the spring meeting itself. Expect plenty of networking opportunities and some fun surprises! For more information see http://ncuraregion1.org/2013regionspringnh.html.

In closing, I would like to encourage you to “like” and contribute to our NCURA Region I Facebook page (https://www.facebook.com/ncuraregion1). It’s one of the best ways to get breaking news and to connect with other research administrators who are friends of Region I. Anyone can post at any time!

Karen Woodward Massey is the Chair of Region I and serves as the Director of Education and Outreach in Research Administration Services at the Faculty of Arts and Sciences (FAS), Harvard University. She may be reached at chair@ncuraregion1.org.
The feedback from our membership in response to the creation of a regional Professional Development Committee in 2012 has been phenomenal! In 2012, we successfully delivered two workshops that exceeded expectations which were reflected in the attendee evaluations. Some of the recurring comments on the evaluations were: “Dynamic presentation”; “Loved the real life examples”; “Well worth my time” and “Interactive structure”.

The goal of Region II’s Professional Development Committee for 2013 will be the same, which will be to create educational, affordable workshops taught by exceptional faculty from Region II in different locations throughout our region so that it can accommodate easy travel for anyone within the region.

On February 26, we delivered our first successful workshop in 2013 titled, “Hot Topics in Research Compliance” in Baltimore, MD to overwhelming positive feedback.

If you would like to experience and benefit from the teaching moments of future workshops, I will be sending regional email announcements with the location of our future offerings.

If you are interested in hosting a “Hot Topics in Research Compliance” workshop at your institution or if you are interested in hosting a workshop tailored to a specific topic, please contact me directly at Brian.Squilla@jefferson.edu.

Our Regional meeting will be held in Buffalo, NY, April 21-24, 2013 and is titled: Maintaining Balance: Service and Regulations in Research Administration. The meeting will be held at the Buffalo Marriott Niagara. The hotel is only minutes away from the splendor of Niagara Falls.

Our Program Committee has been working diligently to create an outstanding meeting. The program is loaded with fantastic programming in addition to networking opportunities.

Here are just a few of the incredible speakers and workshops:

Keynote and Plenary Speakers: Jacque L. Waggoner, Chief Executive Officer, Hunter’s Hope Foundation and Martin Wachadlo, Architectural Historian and Preservationist

½ day Workshops (Sunday):
- Pre-Award Basics; Denise Clark, University of Maryland, College Park, and Dennis Puffrath, University of Maryland, Baltimore
- Reviewing, Negotiating, and Accepting Federal Contracts; John Hanold, Pennsylvania State University, and Jill Frankenfield, University of Maryland, College Park
- Maintaining Balance and Composure in Departmental Research Administration; Brenda Kavanaugh, University of Rochester, Erin Bailey, University at Buffalo, and Michele Codd, George Washington University
- Export Control Basics:Faculty TBA

Sessions will be held Monday through Wednesday with follow up discussion groups to continue the learning opportunities from the sessions. Our Program Committee has organized networking events such as a trip to Niagara Falls and a welcome reception. In addition, we will be holding a CRA review session (as we did last year) on Saturday, April 20th. We hope to see you in Buffalo!

Please visit our Region II Spring Meeting website to learn more about our meeting at: http://ncuraregionii.org/regional-spring-meetings/spring-meeting

Brian Squilla serves as the Chair of Region II and is the Chief of Staff, Office of the Dean of the Medical College, Thomas Jefferson University.
III members currently participating in this program:
Carolyn Elliott-Farino - Kennesaw State University
Erica Gambrell - University of Alabama
Rick Smiley – East Carolina University

In response to requests from the membership, the Executive Committee approved the creation of a Professional Development Committee to perform tasks to facilitate regional business and activities. One of the tasks of this new committee is to develop a proposal for adding Region III programming outside of the annual Region III meeting. The Executive Committee has appointed Beryline Temples from the University of Central Arkansas as the chair of this committee. If you have suggestions for this committee or would like to participate on the committee, please contact Beryline at beryline@uca.edu.

For those of you who like to plan ahead, here are the dates and locations of future meetings to put on your calendar:
2013 NCURA National Meeting
Washington, DC August 4th-7th
2014 NCURA Region III Meeting
Tradewinds Resort Tampa, FL May 2nd-7th
2015 NCURA Region III Meeting
Wild Dunes Resort Isle of Palms, SC May 9th-13th

Bill Lambert serves as Region III’s regional corner contributor and is Assistant Dean for Research Administration, Rollins School of Public Health, at Emory University.

Now I’m sure that all of you have been dreaming your whole life of the chance to visit Milwaukee in the springtime. This is your lucky year! Make your plans now to join us on April 14-17, 2013 for “Researcher Fest” in Milwaukee – the NCURA Region IV Spring Meeting. A fabulous meeting has been planned for you. There will be 8 half-day and full-day workshops and 60 concurrent sessions, discussion groups, and case studies.

From introductory topics to senior forums, and updates from federal agencies and private foundations, there’s bound to be a session just right for you. There are also plenty of opportunities to volunteer at the spring meeting, whether you want to help out at the registration desk, evaluate a session, or lead a dinner group. Volunteering is a great way to build your network as well as give back to the regional community. Sign up online at: www.ncuraregioniv.com/conferences.html.

By now you’ve already received the latest incarnation of the regional newsletter, which is now being delivered in html format through Constant Contact. In addition to a slick, professional appearance, this format also allows the Communications Committee to track how many people are opening the newsletter, and to know which articles are being read most frequently. Over time, we’ll be able to ensure that what goes into the newsletter is content that our members find most valuable and interesting. Thanks to everybody on the Communication Committee who have worked on this throughout 2012!

Before my terms ends, it would be remiss of me to not recognize those members who have stepped forward in leadership roles this year and served as committee chairs. Thanks so much for your time and effort in 2012-2013.

Awards Committee – Julia Rodriquez, University of Missouri
Communications Committee – Ru Knoedler, University of Michigan
Membership Committee – Sue Grimes, Purdue University
Nominations Committee – David Ngo, University of Wisconsin
Professional Development Committee – Jennifer Duncan, University of Missouri
Site Selection Committee – Natalie Goodwin-Frank, Washington University

At the national level, I’m very pleased to report that we simply have too many of our members working with national committees and programs to name in this space. But I would like to recognize David Lynch, who is our Regionally-Elected Representative to the National Board, and refer you to this website, http://www.ncuraregioniv.com/national-committee.html, to review our impressive list of members working on behalf of our organization and making it what it is. Thanks so much to all of you!

And finally I would like to recognize the Region IV Leadership, David Ngo (Past Chair) for his many years of service to the region, but most importantly for his two years of guidance to me, Shannon Sutton (Treasurer) and Michelle Schoenecker (Secretary and Newsletter Editor) for their
professional services to the region and for their seemingly endless patience with my dumb questions, and Jeremy Miner (Chair-Elect) who will do an outstanding job as Regional Chair next year. Thanks to all of you for your support in the past year.

Have a great start to 2013, and I hope to see you in Washington this summer for AM55!

Jeffrey Ritchie, CRA, serves as Chair of Region IV and is Director of Sponsored Programs at Lewis University.

REGION V
Southwestern
www.ncuraregionv.com

Pack your boots and join us for the Region V spring meeting April 21-24 in Oklahoma City. With the theme Research Administration: The Energy Behind Research, the meeting promises to Inform, Inspire and Engage. The opening reception on the 50th floor of the Devon Energy Tower will set a record—the highest reception in NCURA history. The Monday morning keynote “The Future of Research Universities: A SWOT Analysis,” delivered by Dr. Stephen M. Prescott, president of the Oklahoma Medical Research Foundation (and a native Texan!), will set the stage for a mix of presentations and discussion sessions on significant pre-award, post-award and compliance topics. And on Wednesday morning we will have a drawing for an iPad 2.

When sessions are over for the day, there will be plenty of options for dining and entertainment. The meeting hotel, the Oklahoma City Sheraton (an economical $81 per night), is located across from the Chesapeake Arena and two walking blocks from the Bricktown Entertainment District. On Tuesday, April 23, the Oklahoma City Festival of the Arts opens. Billed as a community celebration of the visual arts, performing arts and culinary arts, the festival has been recognized as one of the top 10 in the US. The festival runs through April 28.

In addition to the low hotel rate of $81, the registration cost is $350, the same as 2011. See the Region V website www.ncuraregionv.com for a link for meeting and hotel registration and other information.

Plan to volunteer. Volunteering is the best way to become engaged with the organization, to network and to make new friends. Volunteering can make the meeting a more enriching experience. Because the spring meeting is completely the work of volunteers, it offers a range of volunteer opportunities. Planning the program has been a year-long effort for the program committee. Other volunteers have been working to develop workshops and sessions. Many more volunteers will be needed to work at the registration/information desk, assemble packets, greet newcomers, moderate and evaluate sessions and assist with the hospitality suite, dinner groups and other activities. Watch for eBlasts and check the Region V website for information on how to sign up for specific volunteer opportunities.

See you in OKC.

Kathleen Harris, Ed.D., serves as Region V Chair and is the Senior Associate Vice President for Research at Texas Tech University.

REGION VI Western
www.ogrd.wsu.edu/r6ncura

First things first… the 2013 Region VI/VII Spring Meeting is just around the corner! Hope to see you in Phoenix, Arizona. The meeting will take place April 7-10. We have sessions and workshops covering a wide range of topics from proposal development and budget-building, to conflict of interest, to electronic research administration, to subaward issuance and Federal contracting, award management, and much, much more. Please visit our new meeting website for all the details (session and workshop descriptions, hotel, registration):

https://sites.google.com/site/regionviviannualmeeting

One of our top priorities is volunteerism. NCURA is only as strong as its membership, but we can only get better with new ideas! Whether you are a long-time member who has not yet gotten involved on a committee or volunteered to help out at a meeting, or if you are a new member looking for opportunities, we welcome everyone. There are both committee opportunities where you can serve as a member and learn from the committee chair and other more experienced NCURA-ites, or you can volunteer to help out at a meeting (whether that be the upcoming Regional Spring Meeting or one of the National meetings). These are just a few of the ways to be part of NCURA without feeling like you have to run for an office right off the bat!

Personally, I am a fan of volunteering at the registration desk because it is a great way to meet a lot of people in a short period of time. Lastly, there are ways to get involved without traveling to a meeting. For example, some of the committees do most if not all their work via email and phone conferences. If you are interested in volunteering or just want to chat about what options are out there, please contact Melissa Mullen, Volunteer Coordinator, at mmullen@calpoly.edu to find out how you can get involved.

What a year – we get an extra Annual Meeting! Starting this year, the Annual Meeting will take place every August. This year’s meeting will be August 4-7 in Washington, DC. As with every meeting, our Region is excited to offer travel award opportunities to those who have never attended a
NCURA conference. An announcement will be made around April for applications for the Region VI Travel Award to attend the NCURA Annual Meeting.

Lastly, huge thanks and appreciation to our Program Committee of the Regional Spring Meeting for putting together high-quality, topic-rich sessions and workshops presented by both seasoned research administrators and new faces too! As always, drop me a line anytime with any questions, comments or feedback…. Cheers, Katherine Ho, Region VI Chair

Katherine Ho serves as Region VI Chair and is the Deputy to the AVP and Executive Director of the Office of Sponsored Research at Stanford University.

REGION VII Rocky Mountain
ncuratregionvii.asu.edu

2013 Region VI/VII Spring Meeting
Sunday, April 7 - Wednesday, April 10
Happy New Year! The Region VI and VII Spring meeting is just around the corner. For your planning purposes, here is information about hotel room reservations, preliminary information about the workshops, and registration fees. While hotel reservations can be made now, registration for the meeting is expected to be open in early February. Please check the meeting website for details http://www.ogrd.wsu.edu/r6ncura/meetings.aspx

Theme: Success Through Synergy: Partners, Purpose & Passion
Meeting website: http://www.ogrd.wsu.edu/r6ncura/meetings.aspx
Hotel: Renaissance Phoenix Downtown Hotel (a Marriott property)
50 East Adams Street  |  Phoenix, Arizona 85004
602-333-0000  |  800-309-8138
Room rates start at $169/night, single or double occupancy.
For reservations, call the hotel or book on-line at:
https://resweb.passkey.com/go/NCURA2013

Registration: Registration will open in early February! Early Bird Payment received on or after March 1, 2013

REGISTRATION FEE
Member $380.00 and $480.00  Non-Member $460.00 and $540.00

WORKSHOPS $110 for half-day workshops; $220 for full-day workshops

Workshops as of 1/10/2013:
Workshop details, including presenter names, are listed at the meeting website. All workshops are half-day unless otherwise noted.

• (full-day) The Essentials of Research Administration at the Departmental Level
• Federal Contracting and Negotiation, Including the FAR
• Implementing Research Ethics Training Programs
• Post-Award Basics and Financial Issues in Research Administration
• Pre-Award Basics
• You’re in Charge of Yourself — Self-Guided Professional Development
• Subawards & Subrecipient Monitoring: The Basics and Beyond
• Export Control

Concurrent Sessions, Discussion Groups: Information will be posted to the meeting website in early February.

Tony Onofrietti, M.S., CRSS, serves as the Region VII Chair and is Director of Research Education in the Office of the Vice President for Research at The University of Utah.

http://www.ncura.edu/content/regions_and_neighborhoods/international.php

SAVE THE DATE - 1st International Region Meeting
Wednesday April 9, 2014 | Washington Hilton | Washington DC

The International Region plans its first International Region Meeting to be held at the Washington Hilton in Washington DC on April 9, 2014. We have been lucky and will be able to combine the very first meeting with the INORMS (International Network of Research Management Societies) conference, which in return will be held for the very first time in the U.S. and which will take place from April 10 to 14 at the same premises. This will be an excellent opportunity for all NCURA members to combine the attendance of both meetings. During the International Region Meeting you will have the possibility among others to get inside information regarding Horizon 2020 and to network with Research Managers from around the world. Please also note that the first conference day for INORMS will be devoted to the National Institutes of Health (NIH).

Therefore seize the opportunity and attend the 1st International Region Meeting as well as INORMS 2014.

Stay tuned - more to be followed.

Agatha Keller serves as the Chair of the International Region and is Co-Director EU GrantsAccess at ETH Zurich, University of Zurich.
Robert Andresen, formerly Assistant Director Research and Sponsored Programs at the University of Wisconsin-Madison, was promoted to Director of Research Financial Services/Associate Director, in Research and Sponsored Programs at UWM effective January 1.

G. Maggie Griscavage, CRA, GWCCM, and Director of the Office of Grants & Contracts Administration at the University of Alaska, Fairbanks, has retired.

David Richardson, formerly Associate Vice President of Research, Director of Sponsored Programs at The Pennsylvania State University, is the new Associate Vice Chancellor for Research and Director of the Office of Sponsored Programs at the University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign as of March 18.

Craig Reynolds, formerly Chief Administrator, Biological Chemistry at University of Michigan Medical School is now Associate Director for the Office of Research and Sponsored Projects at the University of Michigan.
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NATIONAL CONFERENCES
55TH ANNUAL MEETING
Washington Hilton Hotel, Washington, DC .................................August 4-7, 2013

NATIONAL TRAVELING WORKSHOPS
FINANCIAL RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION WORKSHOP
Seattle, WA ..............................................................................June 10-12, 2013
LEVEL I: FUNDAMENTALS OF SPONSORED PROJECT ADMINISTRATION WORKSHOP
Seattle, WA ..............................................................................June 10-12, 2013
LEVEL II: SPONSORED PROJECTS ADMINISTRATION WORKSHOP – CRITICAL ISSUES IN RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION
Seattle, WA ..............................................................................June 10-12, 2013

ONLINE TUTORIALS
A Primer on Clinical Trials – 8 week program
A Primer on Federal Contracting – 8 week program
Intellectual Property in Research Agreements – 8 week program
A Primer on Subawards – 8 week program

REGIONAL SPRING MEETINGS
Region I (New England), New Castle, NH .........................April 29-May 2, 2013
Region II (Mid-Atlantic), Buffalo, NY .................................April 21-24, 2013
Region III (Southeastern), Memphis, TN ..............................April 14-17, 2013
Region IV (Mid-America), Milwaukee, WI ............................April 21-24, 2013
Region V (Southwestern), Oklahoma City, OK .....................April 21-24, 2013
Region VI / VII (Western/Rocky Mountain), Phoenix, AZ .........April 7-10, 2013

DEADLINES FOR MAY/JUNE 2013
Submission of Articles to Contributing Editors .........................April 8, 2013
Submission of Articles to Co-editors ......................................April 15, 2013
Submission of Advertisements ..............................................April 15, 2013

Additional information for authors can be found at:
www.ncura.edu/content/news/newsletter/author_instructions.php

For further details and updates visit our events calendar at www.ncura.edu