Innovative Tools

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FEATURES

Keeping Pace with Technological Advancements in Research and Research Administration
By Tracy W. Louder .................................................................4

Innovative Solutions to Sponsored Award Closeouts
By Meidy Candia-Leyva and David Ngo ........................................6

University of Michigan Pilot Project for the Review of “Other Support”
By David Mudder and April Pepperdine ..........................................8

How Implementation of Business Intelligence Tools in Research Shared Services Helped Create Added Value and Improve Reporting Efficiencies
By Janice Grace, Johanna Ficatier, Kathleen McNaughton, Tara L. Rah, Jeffrey Schmoll and Karen A. Hartman ................................11

Research Administration in Europe: Breaking the Silos—Building Research Support Services by Reshaping the Old and Creating New Solutions
By Andreja Zulim de Swarte and Christian G. Jagersma .................14

Digital Transformation Driven by COVID
By Randi Wasik ........................................................................16

Lessons Learned: Finding the Positives When Things Do Not Go as Planned
By Trisha Brinton ......................................................................18

Research Administration in the Middle East and North Africa: People, Networks, and Technology—How Can Universities Leverage Those Three Pillars
By Sana Ahmad and Emily Yuan .............................................20

Preparing for a Complex Proposal Pre-Solicitation: While You Can’t Control Deadlines, You Can Control Starting Lines
By Zachary David Nichols ..........................................................22

RAAAP is Back… Again!: HIBARMA—How I Became a Research Manager and Administrator
By Melinda W. Fischer, Simon Kerridge, Madhuri Dutta, and Cristina Oliveira .................................................................24

Theory-Informed Practice Elevates Research Administration
By Jenn Stewart .........................................................................28

Innovative Tools for Change—Inclusive Human Centered Leadership
By Mario Medina and Saiqa Anne Qureshi ..................................31

NSF OIG Corner—NSF’s Management Challenges for FY 2022
By Elizabeth Argeris Lewis .......................................................35

Inclusion Initiatives—Harnessing Digital Tools for Recruitment in Research Administration: Striving for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion
By Saiqa Anne Qureshi and Marianne Woods .............................36

Why Does Technology Matter in Resolving Research Misconduct Allegations?
By Paula Robinson ..................................................................38

Research Administration in Asia Pacific: Online Communication and Digital Transformation for URA Cooperation
By Amane Koizumi ..................................................................40

Connecting in a Virtual World
By Kim Holloway and Bella DiFranzo ......................................42

Mentoring and Supporting Junior Faculty Members
By BreeAnn Brandhagen and Jennifer Lawrence .......................45

Boundless Collaboration—Getting to Know Our Region VIII Colleagues at a Deeper Level
By Lisa Kennedy .....................................................................47

Full Team Ahead—Harnessing the Power of Collaboration
By Sherri Weaver, Betty Fernandini, Shibali Patra, and Courtney M. Gomez .................................................................53

NCURA NEWS

President’s Message ..................................................................3

Pre-Award Research Administration (PRA) Conference ..........5

Work Smart ............................................................................15

Training Tips ...........................................................................26

Financial Research Administration (FRA) Conference ..........27

Research Management Review Call for Articles .................33

NCURA Research Program Call for Proposals ..................44

Notable Practices ...................................................................46

2022 Board of Directors & Standing Committees ............50

Education Scholarship Fund
Select Committee Update ......................................................51

64th Annual Meeting ..............................................................56

Member Milestones ...............................................................58

Regional Corner ...................................................................60

Spotlight on Research ...........................................................64

Calendar of Events ................................................................Back Cover

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INNOVATIVE TOOLS

IN THIS ISSUE: This issue examines how technology and disruptive innovation challenges our current ways of thinking and how we approach research administration. Our colleagues are doing just that. Be sure to check out “Why Does Technology Matter in Resolving Research Misconduct Allegations?” by Paula Robinson, “Keeping Pace with Technological Advancements in Research and Research Administration” by Tracy Fischer, Simon Kerridge, Madhuri Dutta, and Cristina Oliveira offer the insights from the prior two surveys in “HIBARMA—How I Became a Research Manager and Administrator.” While our Training Tips covers those challenges we all face. David Mulder and April Pepperdine tackle novel ways to address new “Other Support” requirements in “University of Michigan Pilot Project for the Review of Other Support.” Meanwhile, “Innovative Solutions to Award Closeouts” by Meidy Candia-Leyva and David Ngo, shares how to automate the process.

As we continue to grow as a profession, we challenge our ways of thinking and ensure diversity, equity and inclusion are part of our growth. Melinda Fischer, Simon Kerridge, Madhuri Dutta, and Cristina Oliveira offer the opportunity for members to participate in the RAAAP-3 survey and share insights from the prior two surveys in “HIBARMA—How I Became a Research Manager and Administrator.”

While our Training Tips covers “Growing the Next Generation of Research Administrators Together” and Inclusion Initiatives informs how “Harnessing Digital Tools for Recruitment and Research Administration—Striving for Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion.”

Finally, COVID-19 challenges gave us the perfect opportunity to evaluate the proverb “necessity is the mother of invention.” “Digital Transformation Driven by COVID” by Randi Wasik details how healthcare and clinical research adapted for telehealth and how FDA regulatory changes under emergency provisions may allow for this to be a new standard.

As we venture into 2022, we look to embrace innovation as an essential tool for our profession.
MESSAGE FROM YOUR PRESIDENT

By Ara Tahmassian, NCURA President

It is with great pride and enthusiasm that I assume my term as NCURA’s president. Academic based research and innovation has been the engine driving the economic and social development in the U.S. for nearly eight decades. During this incredible period our researchers have been challenging the existing theories and technologies, giving rise to an amazing array of new discoveries in every scientific field. For over six decades of this amazing journey, our membership has been there to support this incredible research enterprise and to help the researchers meet the changing research administration and management environment which has grown more complex as the regulatory environment for research enterprise has expanded. I have been fortunate to observe this in my institutional role and more directly as the recipient of support from research administrators who have made management of any grants I receive easy by removing administrative burdens and allowing me to spend more time on the projects.

Denise Wallen, one of my predecessors, referred to NCURA as the “dynamic organization.” This has been proven true over the years as the organization and its membership have continuously met the challenges in supporting the researchers with new and innovative approaches to research administration and management. This innovation and dynamisms have been best manifested in the past in the past two years during which with the pandemic impacting everyone’s professional and personal lives globally, we have continued to adjust and thrive as a community. Our organization and membership’s ability to adjust programs, service delivery, meetings, and daily operations to meet the challenges of the new work environment and to share their experiences is a testament to the incredible talent and dynamism of our global membership, the Board of Directors, and the incredibly talented professional staff of NCURA.

Our motto is “Supporting Research... together” and our values are “integrity, excellence, service, collegiality, transparency and inclusiveness.” I am committed to maintaining our excellence and ensuring that we continue upholding our values by including every member of our community. We are an organization that thrives on voluntarism, and I would like to appeal to every member to get involved in regional and national programs and to contribute towards our continued excellence.

In the coming year we are looking forward to seeing many of you at FRA and PRA conferences, which like many of our sister organizations will be held in person. In person giving us the opportunity to continue our collaborations. I am also looking forward to working with the Board and our Committees to advance our initiatives currently in progress and launching new initiatives recommended by the Board or the Committees.

Warm regards,

Ara

Ara Tahmassian, PhD, is the 2022 NCURA President and Chief Research Compliance Officer at Harvard University. He can be reached at ara_tahmassian@harvard.edu.
Technology plays an essential role in our daily lives. In this era, some technology has become very common. Smartphones, touchscreen tablets, smart televisions, and the internet would be considered a norm by many. Technology affects almost every aspect of our lives. We utilize technology for communication, to gain access to food, make financial transactions, assist with our health goals, provide for efficient transportation, and perform our jobs in most cases, including tasks in research and its administration. Technology is truly changing the landscape. People of all ages spend more of their time on various technological devices to connect with others through video calling, retrieve information, and conduct business (Abdoullaev, 2021).

Taking a glimpse at how technology is affecting academic research and research administration is the task at hand. To begin with, technology is transforming and shaping academic research today. However, this isn’t new to academic research. In the 1960s, computer scientists innovated a complex statistical analysis software to prevent researchers from doing linear regressions by hand. This software is still being utilized and is known as the SPSS. Academic research has a rich history of leveraging technology to improve results. Some of our faculty take advantage of online platforms to gain assistance from predictive analysis to data collection. Qualtrics is a popular cloud data application that was created and designed for higher education institutions. The Qualtrics software can handle complicated research tasks and is known to be user-friendly enough for students to operate with ease. The Mendeley platform guides researchers to network, collaborate, and collate their work. Mendeley is known chiefly for managing papers or for generating bibliographies for scholarly articles. Elsevier is clearly changing the way research articles are being published. A platform called Zooniverse gives a crowd-based approach to scientific research (Information Age, 2018).

In regard to research administration, historically research administrators focused on improving operations to better serve faculty, staff, and students and to facilitate compliance. In this era, research administrators are expected to generate insight to assist with institutional decisions and strategy. Research administrators look for creative ways to leverage existing technology to achieve their goals successfully. Presently, the most popular pre-award technological systems include Kauli’s Coeus, eVision’s Cayuse, InfoEd, Oracle’s PeopleSoft, and Huron’s Click. A tiny percentage of universities have built their own systems or rely on manual processes. The most popular technological post award research administration systems are currently Oracle’s PeopleSoft, Ellucian’s Banner, Kauli’s Coeus, Workday, and Oracle EBS (Saas & Kemp, 2017).

Technology will continue to advance. When selecting new technology for research or research administration, the decision-makers should thoroughly review what is being offered, how each option will improve its present state from a research and operations perspective, as well as the cost when deciding on a system. As it continues to advance, there should be some adjustment in cost so that institutions of all sizes can harness the benefits of tech solutions.

References


Tracy W. Louder is the Associate Director of Sponsored Programs and Research at Auburn University at Montgomery in Montgomery, AL. She is an expert in research administration with more than 25 years of experience in pre-award and post-award services, accounting, and the management of research compliance and sponsored programs. She can be reached at tlouder@aum.edu.
NCURA and the PRA Program Planning Committee are excited to see everyone at the 16th Annual Pre-Award Research Administration (PRA) Conference! Research Administrators as a community embrace change as an essential ingredient of the research experience. The last 2 years have brought “Waves of Change” to every part of our work and our lives. Our theme reflects the boundless strength of our community and the infinite possibilities of the research and principles we support. We live and breathe our commitments to the science; to diversity, equity and inclusion, and to each other. We will have outstanding programming to deepen your knowledge and networks, and we will start with an infusion of joy and resilience for our PRA Conference Community.

I must put my needs last for the sake of my job. I feel like I have to sacrifice everything for the sake of success. I am powering through but barely surviving. I am overwhelmed, overworked and on my way to burning out. From the outside I appear successful, but from the inside I am a mess. I feel stuck and I don’t know how to move forward.

Do any of these sound familiar to you? You are not alone! Here is the good news: Burnout isn’t final, you can bounce back and breakthrough!

Don’t miss our Keynote, Dawn Kaiser — speaker, coach and “Joy Refueler” — on March 17th. Dawn will share powerful and easy ways to build resilience capacity, utilize the joy code to reframe adversities, and fend off burnout and recharge your energy. Dawn Kaiser is a Certified HR Professional who inspires individuals to unleash the joy in their lives. This is an investment in you and your 2022... don’t miss it!

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- P.U.T. it in Teams: Leveraging the Microsoft Teams environment for the preparation and submission of complex grants
- Horizon 2020: What is it, and what is the latest?
- The Speed of Trust in Research Administration (developing research by building trust with PIs and colleagues)
- Training for Pre-Award in a Virtual Environment
- Outsourcing Clinical Research Management — What, How, Why
- Jambalaya: What’s in the Mix for Other Support?

Do not forget all the sessions dedicated to OMB, NSF, NIH, COGR, and FDP updates. This is just the beginning! Check out the over 100 sessions on tap for you in New Orleans.

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We hope that you have reserved your room and registered for a full in-person experience with PRA. If you have not, do not wait any longer. Register today! PRA is an opportunity to be together, to get the latest information, to deepen our knowledge, to strengthen our networks, to refuel and take in the magic that is New Orleans.

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Closeout backlogs are a never-ending battle that research administrators fight on a daily basis. Keeping up with closeouts is a necessary but daunting task, as it often takes a back seat to more pressing priorities such as grant proposal submission deadlines, final billing, or final financial report deadlines.

While closeouts are not always the most popular item on a research administrator’s to do list, there are many reasons why you do not want to leave them unattended for too long. Uniform Guidance (2 CFR 200.344) dictates that grants must be closed out within one year of the project end date. The recent update in the Uniform Guidance gives non-Federal entities 120 days to submit all reports and liquidate all financial obligations. Many universities still operate under the old 90-day rule for closeouts, sticking to traditions set forth by sponsors like NIH and NSF.

Institutions handle closeouts in many ways. Usually there will be closeout reminders, a closeout checklist, and some systems even have closeout workflows. Post award responsibilities are often divided up into portfolios by sponsor or college. With the growing administrative burden, leaders in research administration are turning to innovative ways to streamline closeout and automate wherever possible.

NYU has truly set the bar with their innovative response to tackling the closeout challenge, assessing how to best tackle project closeouts for an ever growing and complex portfolio. The institution recognized that the traditional means of approaching post award closeouts was not always feasible. Hiring additional staff is a complicated and time-consuming process that, although ideal, may not always be within budgetary goals for the fiscal year. Hiring consultants, another traditional approach, is not always optimal due to the investment of time required to recruit and train them and the loss of the resource and knowledge acquired once the engagement terminates. A new and interesting solution was using Artificial Intelligence (AI) to address project closeouts in the long term.

As NYU decided to pursue this solution, it was imperative to understand what AI truly stands for in its most basic application. In its simplest definition, AI is the simulation of human intelligence processes by machines, especially computer systems. A truly fascinating discovery was the realization that there are many different forms of AI applications to solve specific business needs. AI spans from intelligent automation, to machine learning, to robotic process automation, to unsupervised learning and much more. AI is important because it can give universities insight into their operations that they may not have been aware of previously. This is particularly valuable when it comes to repetitive, detail-oriented tasks like analyzing large sets of data. AI tools are designed to complete jobs quickly and with relatively few errors.

Once NYU determined that AI was the solution of choice, the natural next step was to decide what AI application to use in solving project closeouts. A solution for a post award function with award closeout had no precedence. This set the stage for fantastic innovation, but also placed the institution in uncharted waters. After careful consideration of technical readiness, product maturity, development, cost (very important!), and management ownership requirements, the Robotic Process Automation (RPA) solution was decided to be the optimal choice. RPA delivers automated transaction processing, data manipulation, and communication across multiple IT systems. As we all know from experience in higher education, the ability for a bot to interface with multiple IT systems is a necessary requirement since most universities deal with multiple systems in the management of their research portfolio.

The next critical step for NYU was to engage in the actual implementation of the RPA. To accomplish this endeavor, NYU collaborated with a private consulting firm that had expertise in managing RPA implementations using UiPath technology. However, critical preparation happened well in advance to ensure the development phase was efficient and productive prior to actual meetings with the private firm. As an institution, it was imperative for NYU to revisit the closeout policies and make determinations as to whether there were steps within the current process that needed modification or elimination to ensure a smooth implementation of the RPA. An assessment of staff effort in the closeout process also ensured the RPA process satisfied the return on investment of an AI solution.

After careful updates to the closeout process, NYU underwent the process and developed the Process Definition Document that is the roadmap and guiding document to the RPA implementation. This process is onerous, but critical as it captures all of the steps the bot will undergo to replicate a successful closeout within the financial system of record. At this stage of
development, it was crucial for NYU to engage the key stakeholders such as staff members that manage the day-to-day closeout functions, middle management who would be able to make on the go business decisions, and the data analyst(s) to ensure the technical side of the house had proper representation. After many hours of development time and painstaking attention to detailing the closeout process, success was achieved. NYU implemented and went live with the first AI RPA solution for post award closeouts!

To date the RPA bot implementation at NYU has garnered incredible outcomes. Not only did the time to process closeouts significantly improve, but NYU was able to successfully close legacy awards in their financial system, which prior to the RPA seemed like an overwhelming task. NYU senior leadership has mentioned in numerous audit/compliance meetings that “NYU’s goal is to have 100% closeouts on time, every time. The RPA/bot gives us great confidence that we’ll achieve this goal in FY22 and be able to consistently sustain into FY23 and beyond.”

There were, of course, many valuable lessons learned in the pilot. First, as mentioned earlier, be flexible and willing to change the process to reduce steps. It is important to remember that multiple pathways can lead to the same outcome. Second, rethink how you interface with your current financial systems. Ask yourself if there is a better source of data the bot can interface with to obtain financial information. Third, the technology is ever changing and unfamiliar to many, so take the time to engage the post award team, walk them through what an RPA really means and ease any concerns. Communication is key. Fourth, remember the process is very involved and requires a tremendous time commitment for the key participants during the development, testing, and implementation of the RPA bot. There will also need to be an eventual handoff to the IT team for subsequent updates and maintenance of the bot. Be sure to engage IT early on in the process.

Above all, as with any AI implementation, it is imperative to understand and accept that your vision of an RPA solution will evolve and be different from where you started, yet the result will still be optimization of project closeouts. Be flexible and open to a new world of automation! If you have questions or would like more information please reach out Meidy Candia-Leyva.

Reference

Meidy Candia-Leyva, MPA, is Assistant Controller, Sponsored Programs Accounting and Finance (SPA) at New York University. Meidy provides leadership and oversight for all the activity in financial reporting, invoicing, collections and accounting associated with NYU’s global research efforts estimated in 2018 at $251 million; this includes over 2,500 active accounts. Meidy has oversight of the post award research portfolio for NYU’s campuses at Washington Square, NYU Abu Dhabi and NYU Shanghai. In 2017 she was awarded El Premio Quijote for her contributions to the Latino community in the City of New York. Meidy has been a member of NCURA since 2017, she recently presented sessions at NCURA FRA and AM63. She can be reached at mc7410@nyu.edu.

David Ngo is Assistant Vice President, Grants, Gifts and Investments Accounting & Compliance at New York University. David ensures the design and delivery of best-in-class research administration services. David’s responsibilities include: compliance and audit functions and delivery of highly responsive customer service to support the needs of faculty, researchers and local staff. David is a Co-Director of The Cohort for Efficiencies in Research Administration (CERA), which seeks to establish industry standards for institutions to effectively and efficiently implement and comply with the regulations that govern sponsored research. David has served as faculty for NCURA travelling workshops, PDC Member, Region IV Chair and Region V Board. He can be reached at david.ngo@nyu.edu.
A midst heightened federal concerns of undue foreign influence in sponsored research and new requirements from federal agencies, the University of Michigan (U-M) has launched a pilot project to conduct a centralized review of certain research investigators’ “Other Support,” “Current and Pending Support,” and similar documents required by sponsors. The pilot project has been facilitated by new functionality in the university’s electronic research administration systems, as well as new business processes within its central offices.

Since September 2020, U-M has required all investigators listed on one of its internal routing forms for sponsored research, which accompany an agency proposal, to electronically “sign” the routing form in U-M’s research proposal management system. An integration point between the proposal management system and the university’s outside activity disclosure system, M-Inform, prevents investigators from completing the electronic signature activity if they don’t have an up-to-date disclosure on record. In addition, when completing the electronic signature process, investigators must answer a new series of questions related to international engagements. The new questions ask investigators if they:

- Participate in any foreign government talent recruitment programs,
- Have any appointments or affiliations outside of U-M with a foreign entity or institution,
- Receive any monetary resources from a foreign entity in support of their research endeavors, or
- Receive any non-monetary resources from a foreign entity in support of their research endeavors.

A new access role for “International Engagement” has been added in the U-M proposal management system. Prior to proposal submission, if an investigator has answered “yes” to one or more of the above questions, and the proposal is for a federal sponsor, the submission appears in an electronic inbox for staff in the U-M Office of Research and Sponsored Projects (ORSP) who have been granted the new role. Working from this inbox, ORSP staff can compare:

1. The investigator’s answers to the new proposal routing form questions,
2. Any outside activities the investigator has previously disclosed in the M-Inform system, and
3. The information provided in the investigator’s proposal documentation (e.g., Biosketch, Other Support, or Current and Pending Support).

In the case of Other Support documents being submitted to the National Institutes of Health (NIH) as part of their Just-In-Time (JIT) process, a second electronic inbox in the U-M proposal management system lists only
those NIH proposals where an investigator has answered “yes” to one or more of the new international engagement questions and the proposal has been flagged in the system for an active JIT request.

By reviewing these three sources of data, ORSP staff are able to work with investigators, when necessary, to make updates to their sponsor documentation prior to proposal submission or at JIT. The details and outcome of the review are captured using additional new functionality in the U-M proposal management system. This congruency review also allows ORSP staff to alert the U-M COI offices when potentially undisclosed foreign activities are identified (Figure 1).

At the time of award, new functionality in the U-M award management system flags the same subset of federal submissions where an investigator has answered positively to one or more of the international engagement questions. However, in this case, the system prevents the award creation process from being completed until U-M COI staff have conducted a similar congruency review of outside activity disclosures, investigators’ answers to the new international engagement questions, and information included in any required sponsor documentation (e.g., Other Support) (Figure 2). COI staff perform the majority of this review in the M-Inform system using functionality recently added specifically for this purpose and record it in the U-M award management system. When necessary, COI staff will request investigators to update their outside activity disclosures or provide updated sponsor documentation to be sent to the applicable agency before the system hold is released and the award creation process can continue (Figure 3).

In preparation for NIH’s January 2022 requirement that supporting documents for any foreign activities appearing in Other Support be provided at the time of JIT, U-M has added a new requirement to the M-Inform system. When completing their outside activity form, if investigators indicate they receive, or expect to receive, NIH funding and they disclose any type of foreign outside activity, they are now required to upload supporting documentation for that activity. In this way, COI staff can review investigators’ foreign activity documents—ideally before they are submitted to NIH as part of Other Support.

To date, results have shown that roughly 10% of investigators included in the pilot population require some sort of update to their Biosketches or Other Support documentation prior to submission to the sponsor. In addition, we have identified instances where sponsor documentation updates were required during the JIT, award stage, and disclosure review processes.

However, it is worth noting that because the population of investigators impacted by the centralized review pilot remains relatively consistent, once the necessary corrections have been made to investigators’ sponsor documentation, the updated versions are more likely to be used in any subsequent proposals. As a result, the number of required changes is anticipated to decrease over time.

The latest phase of the pilot project is focused on how to leverage the system and process changes that have been implemented so far, in conjunction with new ones, to facilitate staff review of investigators’ foreign Other Support, when NIH’s new requirements go into effect on January 25, 2022.

David Mulder, AB, CRA, is the Assistant Director of Regulatory Affairs for Outside Interests and Conflicts of Interest in the University of Michigan Medical School. Previous roles include Program Manager for International Engagement & Research Security in U-M’s Office of Research and Sponsored Projects and Assistant Director for U-M’s Research Administration Systems team. He can be reached at davemuld@med.umich.edu.

April Pepperdine, MPA, is the Conflict of Interest Director in the University of Michigan Office of Research where she oversees the campus program for research related individual conflicts, institutional conflicts, disclosure reviews, Public Health Service reviews, and international engagement Other Support reviews. She has broad experience with policy and process creation and revisions for these areas. She has participated in the customization of the outside activity system since its inception 10 years ago and leads annual enhancements. She can be reached at apepperd@umich.edu.
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Office of Research Regulatory Support (ORRS) provides compliance and FDA regulatory support. The ORRS team includes analysts with FDA expertise who support investigators with IND/IDE submissions and regulatory oversight, as well as analysts who provide investigative support for research compliance.

Office of Sponsored Projects Administration (OSPA) provides proposal and budget development; review and submission of all extramural funding proposals; negotiation of industry funded research budgets and payment terms; and activation and management of awards to ensure compliance with all policy and regulatory requirements.

Legal Contract Administration (LCA) conducts the intake, review, negotiation, execution and management of research-related industry, federal and foundation contracts.

The Institutional Review Board (IRB) is a regulatory body whose responsibility is to ensure the protection of rights, safety, and well-being of the human subject participants in clinical research investigations. The IRB Office employs a team of dedicated administrative and regulatory specialist staff who oversee the system of protocol intake and regulatory review.

The Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) is a regulatory body whose responsibility is to ensure the safety, well-being, and ethical treatment of animal subject participants in clinical research investigations. The IACUC Office employs a team of dedicated administrative and regulatory specialist staff who oversee the system of protocol intake and regulatory review.

The Office of Research Quality provides consulting services for quality improvement and quality management to the areas supporting research at Mayo Clinic who desire or need to continuously improve their operational performance.

Prior to 2021, each RSS office independently created metrics to report operational performance. Some metrics were created for research leadership’s strategic objectives, while others were created to track operational performance.
performance and identify opportunities for improvement. All RSS offices started from a different point in their data metrics journey; however, each office utilized manual processes which required staff to download, analyze, proof and create graphs for metric reporting. These manual steps were then repeated on a monthly basis. This process consumed approximately 250 hours each month for the combined RSS offices. An initiative to modernize metrics reporting using business intelligence tools to create dashboards began in late 2019 with an initial goal of providing more transparent real-time data to research leadership.

Mayo Clinic selected an enterprise business intelligence (BI) and data visualization tool based on the following features:

- Ability to publish to the Mayo Clinic BI server and provide self-serve access to users
- Consistency for users with other key organizational dashboards using BI and data visualization tools
- Ability to work with various data sources with no limitation on size
- Accessibility to technical support and a learning community (in addition to technical support provided by the BI software vendor, RSS desired a strong community of practice (CoP) to share learnings and best practice)

Transition of the current research shared services metrics reporting to a BI tool required a separate approach for each RSS office, which fell into one of the following development processes:

- New metrics and dashboard creation: defining the metrics to report in addition to adding them to a dashboard and BI tool
- Transition from a manual process to a BI tool: a manual metric reporting process existed and the same metrics were transitioned to the BI tool
- Hybrid: for most RSS offices the initiative included transitioning existing metrics to the BI tool and then defining and adding additional metrics

Data is now readily available on a single platform and on a centralized web page available to all RSS leaders, research executive leadership and departmental research administrators. All newly created dashboards follow the same format and most include the following metrics:

- Active and in process studies / protocols
- Incoming volume (demand) and completed requests (output)
- Turn Around Time
- First Pass Yield
- Staffing to workload which allows all metrics to be considered along with FTE resources for more meaningful resource decisions

Some key benefits of transitioning operational metrics reporting to a BI tool include:

- Data cleaning and analysis is set up once and then automatically updates with “real time” data
- Ability to connect directly to the source databases allows for daily data updates
- Customized views through the use of various filters puts the power in the hands of the user and allows for efficient monitoring of trends as well as identifying opportunities for improvement
- Most significantly, migration to the BI tool resulted in a 98% decrease in manual effort to prepare metrics

In addition, use of metrics by RSS leaders aids in operational decisions such as staffing models and opportunities for administrative simplification and/or automation. For example, the metrics recently helped LCA identify a category of work that was consuming more than a 1.0 FTE. By drilling down into the metrics further, LCA identified an opportunity to automate much of this work and reduced the volume of this specific category of work by 82%.

The implementation of business intelligence tools in RSS for more effective metrics reporting required time and effort; however, the benefits far outweigh the costs and has created added value for both RSS staff and the research community in general. In a spirit of continuous improvement, metrics are constantly being improved and new dashboards created. Ongoing development of these metrics will allow RSS leaders to predict not only their day-to-day work activities and trends, but also to anticipate increases or decreases in work associated with other offices. Future metrics will allow the use of coordinated data from all business units to predict volumes for each business unit and enable RSS to move from a descriptive approach to a more predictive approach.

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The Research Support Office (RSO) at the University Medical Centre Utrecht (UMC Utrecht), The Netherlands is a strategic partner in a full research project cycle. From designing a research idea, shaping the proposals, managing the project, and communicating the results to the wider community and funders.

In an everchanging funding landscape, we designed the compass to guide researchers and research staff from their ideas to results and from results to market. RSO acts as a spider-in-the-web of diverse services research(er) needs, internal departments, strategic programs, as well as our strategic partners and networks.

Position and role
UMC Utrecht is an academic hospital, with a core role to provide specialist healthcare to patients, to educate and train specialists and students in the medical field and to organize and support international recognized research and innovation activities for solutions in healthcare.

With healthcare at its core, research and education is not always seen as a priority. This creates challenges in efforts to develop innovations in the research and innovation landscape. On the other hand, this also creates opportunities to pilot projects within one part of organization, before scaling it up within a wider community.

The RSO at UMC Utrecht is situated in the same strategic division as the Board of Directors: this may be an advantage. We have a centralized model of research support with decentral partners in each of the Divisions’ business units and strategic research programs, who help design budgets, or work on the data management plan, help monitor the financial part of the project or have that Division’s specific issue with the peer support.

Due to our rather independent position, we can advocate researcher’s issues within research (support) system on the one hand, and on the other hand work on development of specific services, guided by researchers’ needs, rather than administrative measures. One of the challenges is the fact that the RSO is often a last resort for many questions. Dealing with ad-hoc questions while keeping an eye on the long-term targets is always challenging.

RSO team members are participating in a large Utrecht RSO network community, that houses RSO colleagues from all seven faculties of Utrecht University. By reaching out and connecting with external partners, we connect the right dots internally and bring the research to a higher level, with the right partners, with the right funding opportunity and the right project managers.

Between challenges and opportunities - Taking the lead
One of the key aspects of the current organization is that the RSO is not part of the formal approval procedures for submitting and processing applications. This fact, together with the limited budget for fixed staff, made it challenging to process all requests for support.

However, since 2016 the Dutch government provides annual support for organizations that were actively engaged with European Horizon 2020 projects. The organizations involved spend this additional funding in line with their own priorities. RSO at UMC Utrecht took the lead there. Because of the trust we received from both the Board of Directors and the researchers’ community, we developed a bottom-up strategic program aiming for a higher participation and success rate in EU funding programs.

One of the tools we developed was the creation of an internal funding program for researchers to hire professional external grant writing consultants. The focus is on supporting researchers that would like to coordinate an EU Horizon 2020 or Horizon Europe collaborative project.

This approach was quite successful. Multiple projects were awarded and from 2018 it was possible to hire project managers that could help researchers in managing EU funded projects with their expertise on EU administration. In
2020, a significant part of the budget for external grant writers was used to hire professional grant writers and to set-up a more comprehensive office that could provide support for all aspects of the proposal development and project management.

Because of this fairly slow growth it was possible to really create a team base with the right mindset and with quite a diverse background and skill set, while at the same time placing the needs of researchers in the middle. Our customer-oriented approach allows for continuous improvements in the process in close collaboration with the researchers. These principles have accelerated the team's growth, doubling in size in 2021.

Another important innovation we helped develop is a smart text-mining algorithm where publications of researchers are used to create personalized funding opportunities using our external funding database. This removes the need for manually filling in search queries or updating search strings by researchers. The personal funding opportunities are automatically generated and updated real-time on the local intranet making life for both researchers and support staff much easier.

To increase the knowledge and skills of RMA colleagues and to stimulate the formation of networking activities we also created a central fund where all RMs can get funding to enter relevant courses or go to external networking events like the EARMA conference.

The next step is to increase the support for national grant applications to offer funding advice to a wider public and start these strategic collaborations internally as early as possible. Furthermore, we aim to integrate the full-cycle support with all central and decentralized support providers. By doing so, we connect the project to the needed experts, which allows for an increase in efficiency and create room for changes. Collaboration between the support providers is a logical step, but cultural and systematic challenges might hamper a smooth transfer to the new working approach. We expect that with an open-minded approach and intensive formal and informal communication these differences can be overcome!

What shapes us?
In navigating the waters, a strong and resilient team is a haven to shore. We have not been always safe at every haven, and we have had to pass some heavy storms to reach the place we arrived at. We strive for quality and growth, both professional and personal. During the formation of our team, we made sure that each new member feels welcome, had a place to land, has a room for growth, both in exploring within the department and RSO services, as well as outside, such as working on a policy paper for gender quality or, implementing the Medical Device Regulation or developing and participating in research funding days conference.

A team where diversity in expertise and personalities creates opportunities, complement each other, and gives room to develop and continuously improve, a team of Research Support office at UMC Utrecht.

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Utilizing Digital Applications to Streamline Work

Like most of you, I have lived the past (almost) two years in a series of transitions, both personally and professionally. Navigating life, one day at a time, has become the status quo. This lifestyle does not suit me well. Do not get me wrong, I can be very spontaneous (e.g., Malbec instead of the usual Sauvignon Blanc? Sure, why not?)! At my very core, however, I am a planner. My professional world was formerly filled with dry-erase office walls and lots of papers and folders neatly stacked on the desk and tables. Tracking each approaching deadline on huge white boards, in folders for each project, and in piles of printed RFPs were part of my daily existence, pre-COVID. Then, the Friday-the-thirteenth-to-end-all-Friday-the-thirteenths happened in March of 2020 and forced me into transition.

Establishing a home office unexpectedly was probably one of the easier transitions many of us made, but it was still not without challenges. In the first month, I found myself dipping back into the office to bring home one more “essential” thing—folders, vertical file holders, my chair, etc. I could not bring everything though. White boards and the ability to print had to remain in the office. So I did what any research administrator does when faced with adversity, I adapted. I learned how to organize myself on several different digital platforms.

Apparently, I am not the only person who made the switch to digital during the pandemic. If you consult the internet for best note-taking apps, your search returns will be flooded with suggestions. OneNote, Evernote, Notion, Roam Research, and dozens of others offer users the ability to take notes anywhere, anytime. Learning to organize myself in my newfound digital notebook was the steepest part of the learning curve. Once I decided upon a layout that made sense to me, I realized the immense universe of possibilities that were now open to me. Most of the highly rated note-taking apps have both desktop and mobile device capabilities, meaning you can literally take your notebook everywhere your phone goes. Having all my notes, web-links, video and audio clips, and saved articles in one app means I constantly have access to everything I may need, no matter where I am. Most of these applications also have search functions that allow you to find specific articles, links, or notes in seconds. You can also use most of them to work with colleagues, collaboratively, utilizing a “share” function. And we have yet to even discuss the sustainability aspect. No more boxes of paper sent to the recycling center after one use.

There are surely some diehard paper fans who will never be swayed by my argument to switch to digital note-taking. I was a hesitant at first as well. But only carrying my laptop, tablet, or phone to meetings and having the same capabilities as I did with notebooks (but without the coffee stains) has given me an exhilarating freedom from paper and decreased likelihood of losing important notes. I am a true digital convert. And for those of you who just HAVE to know, I am now a Microsoft OneNote addict.

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Digital Transformation Driven by COVID

By Randi Wasik

In what seems like the blink of an eye to many of us, the COVID-19 crisis has brought about change that would have normally taken our institutions years to accomplish. The digital initiative expansion due to the COVID impact saw electronic interactions increase by almost sixty percent and digital platform implementations increase by almost the same percentage (Bestsenny, Gilbert, Harris & Rost, 2021). Across all avenues of healthcare delivery, we not only embraced the digital environment, but we also changed processes, procedures, regulations, and other business acumen at a significant level. By embracing such, we have increased the use of digital tools and platforms which will be sustained, while also ensuring a dynamic and compliant environment.

To keep clinical research moving forward when almost all in-person patient interaction had ceased, the Food and Drug Administration (FDA) issued new, comprehensive guidance for the conduct of clinical trials, with the aim of encouraging virtual patient consultations and remote collection of clinical outcome assessments. Connected digital products (CDPs) are portable software and sensor-based technologies that are designed for patient use with little to no clinical involvement. These products collect health-related measurements from patients; thus enabling remote monitoring and virtual consultation in the clinical research setting. Examples of CDPs include wearable activity trackers, heart monitors, mobile apps used for data delivery and collection, etc.

The most significant change has been the adoption of telemedicine during the pandemic and the perception that its use will continue as a meaningful component of the new norm of healthcare delivery as well as clinical trial implementation and management. This shift in healthcare delivery, borne out of necessity, was enabled by three factors:

1. Increased consumer willingness to use telehealth,
2. Increased provider willingness to use telehealth, and
3. Regulatory changes enabling greater access and reimbursement.

Telehealth provided the bridge to healthcare and clinical trial engagements by ensuring compliance in healthcare and clinical trial delivery with the ability to be reimbursed for these visits. Telehealth now offers a chance to reinvent virtual, hybrid virtual and in-person care models, with a goal of improved healthcare access, clinical trial engagement, outcomes, and affordability.

With the onset of the rapid evolution of digital tools for healthcare delivery and related clinical research, personal data for public-health surveillance raises legal, ethical, security, and privacy concerns. There is concern that emergency measures set precedent and may remain in place permanently. This in turn will lead to the ongoing collection of information about private citizens with no emergency-related purpose. All systems will need to be “proofed” against invasions of privacy and will need to comply with appropriate legal, ethical, and clinical governance. Data can be shared under a legal contract for a well-defined purpose and time, with requirements for independent audit to ensure data is not used for purposes outside of the pandemic. Dynamic consent processes could also allow users to share their data. Privacy-preserving technologies, such as a differential privacy and homomorphic encryption, could ensure that access is limited to the specific purposes of the consented use and is available in tamper-proof manner to allow auditing.

It is widely viewed that clinical trials will gradually become more reliant on remote procedures, as will forms of healthcare delivery, but there are some caveats here. For the regulations mentioned above, it is unclear which of these will stay in place, and how the regulatory oversight of clinical trials will change in this new digital age. Additionally, when it comes to broadening patient representation, clinicians, and investigators will have to consider differences in individuals’ access to the necessary tools. Not all patients have smart phones or reliable internet connectivity. Overall, the consensus is that the trend to go remote will continue. Like any brave new world it comes with warnings and hurdles to overcome, but post pandemic healthcare systems have embraced the gains thus far and continue to push into new pathways of delivery.

Reference

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When we hear the word failure, we typically have a negative reaction: feelings of apprehension, fear, anxiety, nervousness, and doom. Our first response is to quickly move forward from this feeling of shame over not having completed or accomplished something. I have been in situations where I wanted to quickly move from sitting in that discomfort to the next task that would allow me to gain a “win.” But I was recently challenged to critically examine a failure and see if there was something I could learn from that situation. At first, I was apprehensive and not convinced that anything good could come from this experience. It was easy to find blame, in others initially, and then in myself, and to focus on deficiencies. Once I took a step back and worked through those feelings, I could see the lessons that I had learned and could re-evaluate how I viewed failures.

Within the Region V Mustang Mentorship Program, we used *The Leadership Challenge* by Kouzes and Posner to guide our mentoring experience. Kouzes and Posner offer this framework: Model the Way, Inspire a Shared Vision, Challenge the Process, Enable Others to Act, and Encourage the Heart (Kouzes and Posner, 2017). Using this framework, I gained insight about my values and leadership style, and how I wanted to continue my leadership journey. The foundation built from this book was fundamental to finding the positives within my failure.

Most of us do not enjoy using our failures as a building block or lesson learned by other folks. And why is that? Why do we not take the time to find the tidbits that were beneficial and grow from those? Why do we not take the painful pieces and say, “This was not my favorite way to learn, but I was able to further my knowledge and skills through this.”

**Lesson 1: Reconfirming Your Values**

In a *Forbes* article, Carley Sime suggests examining one’s values and using those to define successes and failures (2019). This is similar to the “Model the Way” component of Kouzes and Posner’s framework, where we are asked to find and define our values, (Kouzes and Posner, 2018). Being able to define our values is a key part to growth as a leader. Being able to define our success in relation to those values is another lesson in taking something that did not go as planned and learning from it. Some of the questions that I found myself reflecting on during this season of learning were what I valued in my job and work, and how I was communicating those values to others. For me this meant listening for understanding, being responsive to those I am working with, and fulfilling my commitments. When I shift my lens from “Was this a failure?” to “Was I true to my values within this process?”, then I can see I was successful in listening to my colleagues about issues and concerns they had, responding to people even when the news was negative, and keeping people informed about the steps I was taking to continue making progress on the project.

What does this look like in practice? Taking the time to think about and define your own personal values can help many aspects of your life. Knowing your “why” can allow you to make better decisions, set boundaries, and motivate you to keep moving forward.

**Lesson 2: Relationships Can Be a Success!**

In higher education, rarely are projects completed without a working group, professional council, or advisory committee. This is also true within research administration. Our work touches so many areas across campus, allowing us
to work in and among a variety of groups: faculty, staff, students, and external constituents. It can be one of the most frustrating parts of trying to get something accomplished, and it can also hold amazing rewards. While working to find out if an idea I had was possible to implement, I had many conversations with folks across campus. We had great conversations about not only the idea, but also how it would affect others and who else we should invite to the table.

Even as the process progressed—or more accurately did not—the folks I had taken the time to talk with and gather input from were still a resource. I had taken the time to form relationships that extended past this one project. When we try to make connections and treat those connections as important, regardless of the outcome, then we can foster that relationship in the future. We all encounter times when we get busy and treat conversations and interactions as transactional. The key is to not have all your interactions be outcome-based. Instead, view the process of building and fostering the relationship as the outcome.

Lesson 3: Finding the Edge of Your Risk Tolerance and Pushing Yourself to Grow

Think back to the first time you learned a skill, like riding a bike or handling your first big proposal submission. Did it go exactly as planned? Did you execute each piece perfectly? My guess is no; at some point, you likely experienced failure. That failure, whether it be a fall or a mistake, taught us that we must push through the failure and try again. The act of trying something after a failure is what teaches us to grow and learn. Maintaining the status quo is often easier and less scary, and decreases our risk. But when we push ourselves to try something new or to stretch our skillset, there are many payoffs. We find that we are capable of so much more!

If we were only ever successful, never experiencing failure, would we ever try something new? Or would we stick to what we knew would work? When something goes wrong, take a moment to reflect on the process and where risks can be taken to change the outcome. Often within successful projects we are not pushed to think beyond the success. With a non-success, we can use the outcomes to examine areas that allow us to push the limits and grow.

Take-Aways!

My hope is that by talking openly about our failures, critically examining the process, and being supportive of ourselves and others, we can reframe and rethink our idea of success. By re-committing to our values, seeing relationships and connections as a success on their own, and getting comfortable with pushing our risk tolerance, we can continue to grow and learn.

References


Trisha Brinton is a higher education and research administration enthusiast, who enjoys working across departments to benefit students, faculty, research, and the community. Bringing more than 10 years of K-12/ non-profit knowledge and experience into academia, Trisha is always excited to explore policies, procedures, and ensuring that work is done effectively and efficiently. She is a graduate of the first cohort from the Region V Mustang Mentor Program with NCURA and an inaugural member of SRAI’s Future of Field honorees. She can be reached at tbrinton@uw.edu.
The impact of COVID-19 has changed the landscape of higher education for administrators, faculty and students. Therefore, it has become imperative to enhance institutional resilience by focusing on management efficiency and innovation to strengthen research capacity and build grant readiness.

In this article we explore three key ingredients for innovation: (1) attracting and training the right talent, (2) creating appropriate networks and spaces where ideas can be discussed and validated, and (3) designing and implementing the appropriate technology solutions. We believe that innovation starts with people. Attracting, training, and retaining the right talent is key to any successful transformation. But having the right talent is not enough, we need to create the space for the creation and co-creation of new solutions, a space that captures the input for all stakeholders. This can be achieved by building the right networks, partnerships, and collaborations both within and outside the university. Finally, we need technology solutions that can translate innovative ideas into actionable solutions.

Talent - People and Capacity Building
Administrators who immerse themselves in the science of the research being conducted in collaboration with faculty-led research teams, can deliver optimal outputs while providing an accurate interpretation of regulations, guidelines and funding requirements.

In order to foster research productivity while maintaining high standards of ethics and integrity, it is critical to develop a variety of innovative administrative capabilities throughout the project life cycle. The objective is to provide clear direction for award execution and effective problem solving to help faculty minimize administrative work. Recruiting talent with the most appropriate and relevant skill set is essential for any administration to succeed, particularly those who share the same passion for providing service excellence. In order to increase the capacity and skills of administrators, it is essential to develop the knowledge and administrative infrastructures needed to support key research initiatives. Institutions should aim to link innovation to investment in professional development opportunities for their administrative staff.

Due to COVID-19, efficiencies in resource management had to be maximized, which meant assessing current staffing models to ensure administrators were being delegated responsibilities which matched their professional strengths in order to avoid burnout. This helped with employee morale, as motivated employees became more creative and productive while finding ways to innovate existing business processes.
An innovative way to obtain a holistic view across various functional research workstreams is to implement a rotational working model e.g. between pre and post-award departments. Creating opportunities for cross functional training enables knowledge transfer, creating talent pipeline, and building long term career progression.

Another strategy for talent development and retention in research administration that is often overlooked by many universities is providing leadership development programs that include the opportunity to work in multi-functional groups on real life organisational challenges and projects, providing access to professional coaching, and implementing peer mentorship programs.

**Partnerships and Intra-organizational Collaboration**

With everything around us evolving at an unprecedented pace, there is a stronger need to work together, which has augmented the sense of community, collaboration and humanity among the administrative and academic networks. COVID-19 brought campus life to a halt in 2020 which drastically impacted lab and experimental research. For example a computational scientist who relied heavily on collaborating with external research faculty and other research computing personnel was unable to carry out research work. As a result of this global phenomenon, business processes had to be adapted. Existing partnerships had to be strengthened, and new ones had to be forged to foster connectivity and innovation.

Conducting internal knowledge-sharing sessions across departments, as well as with external administrative networks provides a platform for exchanging useful resources pertaining to effective research administration best practices and innovative solutions to the evolving research space. Those activities include, conducting walk-in sessions with department units, hosting webinars with other universities, creating administrative forums and social groups, and organizing research administration coffee open-house for faculty members. All these social events provide a platform for creating professional networks which help in building a space where innovation thrives.

The biggest challenge in multidisciplinary research lies in understanding the common themes of research areas and how those translate efficiently into execution and achievable actions both for PIs and research administrators. This involves active accountability in the coordination of activities between the administrative and research teams, particularly with fast paced projects and deliverables. To illustrate, New York University in Abu Dhabi (NYUAD) faculty in the division of social science received a prestigious grant from a government organization on researching the Nudge Theory. This grant involved rigorous programmatic collaboration and active monitoring and evaluation between both the institutions, and hence required substantial partnership between the PIs and the administrative teams. Through active collaboration with the PI’s research team, the grants were executed successfully to meet the deliverable timelines and complete the grant milestones. Such a customer driven approach creates a responsibility matrix which holds all stakeholders accountable and promotes synergy towards the achievement of research outcomes.

Creating active synergies between central and departmental research administration units also goes a long way when the common goal is faculty satisfaction, successful project completion and customer service support. Additionally, developing a productive relationship with faculty steering committees can help get faculty buy-in on administrative innovations and policy development.

Finally, while focusing on innovative solutions, it is critical to align operational goals with the overall research and academic strategy, whereby administrators understand the bigger picture driving the institutional research mission and strategic objectives. This has been achieved through informational sessions involving key administrators, academic leaders and faculty to learn more, ask questions, provide feedback and input as key stakeholders who will drive the implementation of the academic strategy.

**Technological Resources and Change Management**

Any change occurring in the research enterprise requires adaptation. Multidisciplinary research presents a range of complexities and demands which regularly prompts research administrators to dive into organizational innovation and change management. This can be achieved by striking the right balance between adopting the best research administration technologies, eRA solutions, and institutional efficiency within the framework of policy compliance.

Involving key stakeholders including faculty in the design and implementation of technology solutions is key to the success of those initiatives. We conducted interviews with faculty members from various academic disciplines at NYUAD to understand their research projects, research trajectory and how we could customize potential technology solutions to provide better administrative support and business tools. Some of the key takeaways included for example having mobile-friendly tools to submit expense claims and user-friendly dashboards to monitor expenses and budget thresholds that include visual graphics, automating time and effort reporting, reducing lead time for IRB approvals, and having access to customisable dashboard where all grant information can be accessed in one place.

Besides initial feedback and input from stakeholders, it is very important to keep an open channel of communication via monthly newsletters, advisory and steering committee meetings to provide status updates on the project’s progress and keep the community informed and engaged with the change initiative.

Finally, designing appropriate training and roll out programs is a crucial step to ensure the success of implementation of innovative technology solutions and securing users’ endorsement. Training programs should be inclusive of all user groups and stakeholders and should be customised according to their needs.

To conclude, innovation must always be driven by shared goals of reducing administrative burden for PIs, increasing business efficiency, and demonstrating accountability while improving overall research performance. Such projects must be undertaken by attracting and training the appropriate talent in research administration, cultivating active PI and researcher participation, soliciting regular feedback, and using technology to deliver innovative research administration tools and measure business efficiencies. This creates a culture of constructive engagement and transparency across all administration and academic domains.

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Complex Proposals Require a Unique Approach

How can research administration professionals efficiently support competitive proposals that fall outside of their usual scope, whether larger in scale, with new funders, or faster turnaround times? The key to addressing these challenges is to put your team in a position to succeed before the release of the solicitation.

What is a complex proposal? A complex proposal is a response to a solicitation that falls out of the norm, for example, a one-off proposal that is difficult to track pre-release and offers a short turnaround period. Specific to the university environment, a complex proposal might also be one that involves leading investigators from different schools or universities. Regardless of a proposal’s complexity, many of these tips are universally applicable; if your team can handle complex proposals, it can handle any others as well.

Why is a special approach necessary? Simply put, on a proposal with a 30-day turnaround, if a team hasn’t started preparation before the solicitation is released, it’s very likely already too late. This can seem like a losing proposition; how exactly can you start work without a solicitation?

While the deadline is set by the funder, your team can extend their turnaround window by working strategically before the release of the solicitation.

Benefits: Having a team and a strategy in place pre-solicitation gives groups the opportunity to dedicate more live proposal time to technical aspects of the proposal that are required by the solicitation, and less to general administrative work that tends to be similar from one solicitation to the next. Managing time like this can level the playing field between bigger and smaller teams and create an overall smoother and less exhaustive proposal process.

Risks: The major risk in preparing proposal materials prior to the release of the official solicitation is unintentionally viewing the ultimate solicitation through the lens of the work done prior to the release. This issue can exhibit itself in two major ways: 1) subconsciously continuing to think about the solicitation through the lens of what you expected to be included, rather than what has been included, and 2) feeling inclined to include materials prepared before the release of the solicitation because they’re ready, because you like them, or because you know how much work went into producing them—even if they aren’t an ideal match for the solicitation.
Tips for Working on Complex Proposals:
Investigator Communication: Knowing which opportunities investigators are interested can be the first challenge in preparing a proposal. Ensure investigators know that more support will be available to those who reach out first, and check in regularly with deans (or equivalents) who may be more aware of research plans. Starting a relationship with investigators pre-solicitation can also help create trust and smooth the path for working together on a project with a tight deadline.

Look for trends in recent and related solicitations: Reviewing related solicitations can help you understand what to expect before yours is released. Check for solicitations recently released by the same funder, and the same sub-office wherever possible. Keep an eye out for what supplemental documents are requested and any trends or changes that could indicate deviation from the proposal format you’ve come to expect.

Calendars: Start thinking about calendars early and have a rough framework in mind for multiple possible due dates when working with funders who are not uniform with turnaround times. This way your team’s proposal kickoff meeting can focus on reviewing and confirming internal deadlines, rather than building a calendar from scratch. Don’t forget to consider holidays and other breaks in your planning.

Make a checklist: Based on your review of related solicitations, put together a checklist. You can use this checklist to ensure you have the right personnel in place, start collecting necessary documents, and produce loose drafts outlining key points and themes. Once the solicitation is released, remake this checklist independently, double-checking any elements that seem to diverge from what you anticipated. This two-part process allows you to check your own work and ensure nothing is missed.

List major pre-solicitation assumptions: Make a list of major assumptions as you progress through your pre-solicitation preparation process (an expected grant component or requirement for collaborators outside academia, for example). Once you’ve read the solicitation, mark up your list with what you got wrong. Keep this list in mind as you progress through the live proposal phase.

Keep an eye on your competitors: Are they building new project websites, forming partnerships, or reaching out to other stakeholders? If these activities seem related to the program you’re anticipating, but not quite in line with your expectations, it’s possible they know something you don’t.

Engage consultants and subcontractors in advance: Highly specialized consultants and subcontractors will have their eyes on specific solicitations in a funder’s pipeline, just like an academic institution will. Try reaching out to these stakeholders as early as possible to secure first-choice partners and benefit from their knowledge and experience throughout the proposal development process.

Prepare the preparable, but leave space: Some proposal elements are almost always requested, and almost always requested in the same format. There is no reason to wait for the release of the solicitation to address these components. Assign these elements in advance, and check that the instructions are as you expected once the call for proposals is published. While preparing sections in advance, also make sure to leave space. It’s much easier, and safer, to fill space than to make it. Bullet points outlining key elements are often better than full narrative when preparing before the release of a solicitation. Avoid creating a complete draft of any section before having the solicitation in hand; thinking your draft is complete risks not bringing a critical enough eye towards the document during the live proposal period.

Build neutral templates: Few organizations have the resources to rewrite supporting and supplemental documents from scratch for each solicitation. Instead of going back to previously submitted versions of a document to edit, try building templates for documents like “facilities and equipment” or “past performance” that are neutral to any expected proposal particulars. Adjust these templates to fit each solicitation, whether removing unnecessary sections from “facilities,” or spinning your past performance to make them as applicable as possible. With this approach, your team can avoid any unintentional drift towards a given project or theme existing in a foundational document that was tailored to fit another solicitation.

“YOUR TEAM CAN EXTEND THEIR TURNDOWN WINDOW BY WORKING STRATEGICALLY BEFORE THE RELEASE OF THE SOLICITATION”

Engage internal experts early: As with consultants, personnel with unique skills (graphic designers or translators, for example) can also be difficult to pull into a project at the last minute. Reach out to these individuals well in advance of a proposal’s release to put the project on their radar.

Monitor the release of the solicitation: When it comes to funders with especially short deadlines, one extra evening to review a full proposal can make a world of difference. When you expect the imminent release of a solicitation, develop a plan for monitoring for its release. Assign different staff the responsibility of checking for the release at an array of pre-determined times each day. For example, one staff member could be responsible for checking each morning, another after lunch, and a third before leaving for the day. This method ensures your team never goes more than a few hours without noticing the release, even if one person misses work or forgets to check.

Pre-solicitation work is not an exact science. These suggestions won’t perfectly fit every solicitation, or every team. Pick those that seem like they might work well with your team and mix in your own lessons learned. Any progress you can make before the solicitation is released, however slight, is a step in the right direction as it expands your team’s turnaround window and gives you a better opportunity to produce a competitive proposal.

Zach Nichols, MA, JD, is Project Manager for large and complex proposals in the Office of the Vice Provost for Research at Tufts University. Zach has experience developing complex proposals in private sector and higher education environments. He can be reached at zachary.nichols@tufts.edu.
For those of you who have been in Research Administration for a few years, you may have participated in the original Research Administration as a Profession (RAAAP) survey in 2016, and the follow-on RAAAP-2 survey in 2019. For those who are unfamiliar, the RAAAP series seek to understand research administrators around the world. The first survey focused on the relative importance of soft (transferable) skills and hard (technical) skills. The second explored support for research impacts. Three years later, it is time for another installment.

Everyone’s favorite research administration survey series is coming to an inbox near you early in 2022! In fact, depending on when this article hits the streets (or Ethernet), it might be available right now. Use the link or the QR code, below, to check for availability. Completing the survey is one easy thing you can do to inform the Research Administrator community of potential trends, barriers, and challenges we need to collectively attend to. You want to be an influencer, don’t you? Who needs Instagram if you can influence research administrator knowledge banks right now!


Using the link above, you can complete the RAAAP-3 survey and contribute to the third dataset. You will also find links to the previous datasets and related articles.

RAAAP-1 focused on the skills that research administrators need and how these differ when moving from an operational, through managerial, and into a research administration leadership position. Spoiler alert, while technical skills are important (and perhaps necessary to get the job), it’s the soft transferrable skills such as communication and collaboration that will promote advancement.

RAAAP-2 focused on supporting research impact. Though full analyses are pending, some surprising results have become evident. Nearly 50% of U.S. respondents reported impact was relevant to their role—this was even higher in other parts of the world, at over 60%. Not surprisingly, the majority of respondents saw a continued role for NCURA in supporting the development of research impact.

So—what about the next iteration of the largest survey of research administrators around the world? We really value your continued support in helping to develop this series of snapshots of the profession; we cannot thank you enough for taking the time to complete the questionnaire! This time we will include even more associations from across the world to try and also capture more views from where research administration is just developing. Knowing the trends from this survey will not only inform individuals in our community, but also these newly formed associations as they establish routes to research administration career development.

This latest iteration of the RAAAP survey focuses on several different aspects of the Research Administrator. While still asking questions about the usual demographics, this new survey seeks to dig deeper into potential diversity and equity issues in the profession. Knowing the trends can help inform our community of areas where institutions and organizations can offer educational opportunities and new marketing and recruitment techniques to attract a more diverse population. These inequities are not isolated to ethnicity, but also extend into culture and gender barriers. Awareness surrounding the “glass ceiling” (Kerridge & Scott, 2018) that still exists, and the ability to benchmark the disparity is one of the data points we hope to establish.

The main focus for RAAAP-3 is HIBARMA—How I Became a Research Manager and Administrator. As Research Administrators, we all know that we have “the best job of all” (Andresen, 2016), but few of us grew up wanting to be a research manager and administrator. How did we find the profession? What did we do before? Our goal is to learn the answers to some of these questions and use this tool to raise the profile of and awareness about the profession. One of the aims of this survey is to identify workforce gaps regarding a lack of diverse cultures, genders, ethnicities, and backgrounds.

By Melinda W. Fischer, Simon Kerridge, Madhuri Dutta, and Cristina Oliveira
Hopefully this evidence will provide a scaffolding to address some of the trends identified by Musalini et al. (2021), in terms of underrepresentation of certain minoritized populations.

Looking to the future - will research administration become a conventional job? Might we even see the day when there is an undergraduate degree in research administration? Though the U.S. began the mainstreaming of Research Administration, Europe is leading the charge with the foRMAtion (2021) project that is delivering an undergraduate taster course in research administration; see also Virágh et al. (2020).

We need YOU to help us map the routes into the profession by sharing your story! By completing this survey, you help inform the development of the profession.

References


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Growing the Next Generation of Research Administrators—Together

By Abby Guillory, Tricia Callahan, Tolise Dailey, and David Hollingsworth

As research trainers, we strive to meet the needs of our research administrators, while also balancing time for effective training development within our universities. Oftentimes, our focus is on our university processes and policies; we strive to ensure our university-specific views and interpretations are represented and understood on our campuses. However, recently, members from Colorado State University, Johns Hopkins University, North Carolina State University, and Texas A&M University partnered to find training innovation in the form of collaboration.

Some larger universities around the country offer training for the Certified Research Administrator (CRA) exam. The development of this type of training can take a significant amount of time for a small training team or, in some cases, a single individual. Instead, these NCURA members teamed up to create a 12-week guided, self-study program to offer to their universities—together. The study program was designed to guide potential applicants through the comprehensive body of knowledge represented on the CRA exam, providing an opportunity for participants to share knowledge and expertise from all universities.

The collaboration was not meant to be the sole source of preparation for the CRA, but was designed to introduce those interested in taking the CRA exam to the exam format and content areas, so that participants could determine where additional study or experience was needed prior to taking the exam.

In addition to study resources, participants received a weekly DID YOU KNOW fact about a topic of interest, pre-work designed to introduce content, sample multiple choice questions to gauge understanding, an hour overview on a specific topic in the lifecycle of an award, and were invited to attend weekly office hours for Q&A.

With more than 80 participants from partnering universities, this Herculean effort was supported by NCURA colleagues across the U.S. and relied on materials shared from other CRA study groups, including Texas A&M University, University of Michigan, and University of Virginia.

The authors would like to thank their colleagues, presenters, and moderators:

- Anne Albinak, Johns Hopkins University
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- Jill Frankenfield, University of Maryland
- Jaquion Gholston, Stevens Institute of Technology
- Marc Lennon, Johns Hopkins University
- Nazam Mohammed, Rutgers University
- David Ngo, New York University
- David Schultz, Rensselaer Polytechnic Institute

The authors were able to meet the needs of many while working, collaborating, and learning together with their NCURA colleagues across the country. What seemed to be a monumental task for a single research trainer became a fun, innovative tool for a number of universities who participated.

Abby Guillory, MLIS, CRA, leads the Research Education and Training team at North Carolina State University. She enjoys sharing her passion for research administration by presenting and serving on the PDC and Education Scholarship Fund Select Committee (chair). Abby is also a Traveling Workshop Faculty and co-contributing editors of NCURA Magazine’s “Training Tips” column. She can be reached at nguillo@ncsu.edu.

Tricia Callahan, MA, CRA, is the Senior Research Education & Information Officer at Colorado State University. A long-standing member of NCURA, Tricia shares her experiences through volunteerism and presenting. A graduate of the Executive Leadership Program (ELP), Tricia currently serves on the PDC and N&LDP. She can be reached at callahal@colostate.edu.

Tolise Dailey, CRA, is the Financial Research Compliance/Training Officer at Colorado State University. She is co-contributing editors of the NCURA Magazine “Training Tips” column and serves on the NCURA Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion Select Committee. She can be reached at tolise.dailey@outlook.edu.

David Hollingsworth, CRA, is the Director of Research Education and Outreach at Texas A&M University. In this role, he implements and maintains a broad array of research administration related learning opportunities and resources and coordinates review sessions for the CRA. David can be reached at dhollingsworth@tamu.edu.
We would like to extend an enthusiastic invitation to you all to join us for the 23rd Financial Research Administration Conference. The meeting will be held in New Orleans, March 14-15 in person at the Hilton New Orleans Riverside, followed by the Workshop Day for both FRA and PRA.

The meeting’s theme is “Being Present with Purpose”. We chose this theme as the world is still facing the impacts of a global pandemic and the research administration realm is still in the midst of changes. The theme reflects the reality of our job evolution, changes to our working environments and is a reminder that even with constantly shifting regulations and policies we must strive to be focused and productive through intentional action. In addition, our institutions are reprioritizing initiatives and evaluating the many changes that have occurred over the last 20 months. As we all strive to make an impactful difference in our profession, let us find strength in today, hope in tomorrow, and exercise humility to all, regardless of our role.

Thanks to a dedicated group of track leads, we have an exciting program full of sessions, discussion groups, workshops and an inspiring keynote speaker, spanning the curriculum of Accounting/Finance, Clinical/Medical, Human Capital/Career Development, Departmental, Diversity, Equity & Inclusion, Federal, Compliance/Audit, Global and PUI tracks. Your attendance and participation is valuable in supporting a diverse, enriching, and dynamic environment that will foster the advancement of your professional development and the research administration community in its entirety.

We are excited to have an amazing keynote speaker this year, NOLA-native Dr. Hakeem Oluseyi, internationally-recognized astrophysicist, science TV personality, and author. Dr. Oluseyi grew up in some of the roughest neighborhoods in the country and will share his thoughts with us in his talk entitled “A Quantum Life: My Unlikely Journey from the Street to the Stars.”

We are hopeful that this conference will provide many positive learning experiences and assist you in your efforts to remain “present with purpose” as our world and roles continue to evolve.

See you in New Orleans!

Co-Chairs of FRA 2022

Sandra Logue
University of Southern California

Jaquion Gholston
Stevens Institute of Technology
I stumbled across the profession of research administration like many of you pre-award folks out there after decades of ignorance to its existence, even after joining the higher education community a few years prior. My past life as a technical communicator fit well within this brave new pre-award world. What a joy to research, write, edit, and reformat every day as part of a predominately undergraduate institution (PUI). Although it is fulfilling to browse through the growing number of polished submissions, I delight in the process versus the substance, where I am continually engaged in the constant flow of learning and growing alongside our varied and colorful principal investigators.

Uncovering Bias
A year prior to landing my dream job here at Southern Utah University (SUU), I decided to return to school to attend a master’s program in technical writing and digital rhetoric (TWDR). I admit I was fairly skeptical going back to school after so many years. After all, my two decades of employment as a technical communicator taught me I simply needed to listen carefully to what my employer wanted and then perform the task at hand. I didn’t have any special theoretical training to guide my work and I managed to do well professionally. However, my TWDR program opened up a whole new world of possibilities. Once I learned concepts such as multiliteracy pedagogy (Cazden et al., 1996), the methodology of participatory design (Spinuzzi, 2004), the theory of visual argument (Birdsell & Groarke, 1996), the rhetoric of visual design (Porter & Sullivan, 1994), the rhetorical analysis of scientific texts (Gross, 1988), and a humanistic rationale for technical writing (Miller, 1979), my bias towards theory exploded. I soon realized that although I was a naturally gifted technical communicator, that didn’t mean I couldn’t do better—much better—with a little theory under my belt to better inform my practice.

The theory of participatory design describes a process that includes multiple stakeholders in the early stages of development. It generally sparks innovation and nurtures a more creative development atmosphere. The following story is one example of how the theory of participatory design came to life for me at our growing PUI.

Participatory Design Meets Practice
During the fall 2020 semester (only weeks after onboarding in my new position), I was presented with an extraordinary and singular opportunity to work alongside some well-known professionals in research administration: Mario Medina from the University of Kansas Medical Center, Richard Seligman, formerly of California Institute of Technology, and Marianne Woods from Johns Hopkins University. My current supervisor (Sylvia Bradshaw from SUU) recommended me as a seasoned technical editor (with novice research administration eyes) to be part of a group that would update one of the books I chose to study as part of my master’s program: The Role of Research Administration (4th edition) published by the National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA). The opportunity to read, update, edit, and reformat a book that would help inform my signature master’s degree project during the 2021 spring semester was surreal. It was an amazing chance to learn from some of the best and brightest minds in the profession.

This book is an introduction to the profession of grant research administration. It is primarily used by sponsored program offices and also by students across the nation as a required textbook for degree programs in research administration. As such, the audience consists of mostly newcomers to the field. The audience also includes some of those who interact with the field—such as the faculty or staff who take on lead roles in sponsored projects, or even the sponsors themselves. The
context for this project includes the desire of NCURA to keep popular books like this one up-to-date. The purpose of keeping books like this current is to provide a relevant introduction to the profession of research administration to those who have a vested interest in this work.

My supervisor organized and scheduled regular committee meetings throughout the semester to work on this project. Since the group consisted of members from across the country, these meetings were held virtually via Zoom technology. The book was created in Microsoft Word but most of the group chose to collaborate via the suggesting mode within Google Docs. The two members who were not comfortable working in Google Docs provided their feedback within Microsoft Word’s track changes function. Once suggestions were received, my supervisor and I each took one set of feedback to incorporate into our shared Google Doc version of the book. This way we could discuss all the feedback at the same time as we worked our way through the book when we held our meetings. This process was a classic example of participatory design (Spinuzzi, 2004). We sent the final version (5th edition) back to NCURA in Microsoft Word, and just like that our book update was born at the intersection of theory and practice.

Theory Inspires
Each one of us immersed in the profession of research administration could benefit from taking a step outside our comfort zones and researching theories that relate to our practice. This applies to all areas—not just pre-award. Because we are often busy performing research for others and their projects, I think it is easy to neglect doing the same for ourselves. However, there is no question a little theory can go a long way to inspire us to think differently and see problems and solutions in a new light. Over the course of my inaugural year in this field, I can say with confidence that theory-informed practice has made all the difference.

References


Jenn Stewart, MA. is a Research Administrator at Southern Utah University in Cedar City where she performs a wide variety of mostly pre-award functions related to project development and proposal submission. Jenn has a master’s degree in technical writing and digital rhetoric and was the technical editor on NCURA’s publication The Role of Research Administration, 5th edition. She can be reached at jennstewart@suu.edu.
Are you new to post-award administration? Do you need to learn about the financial management of sponsored programs? NCURA’s newest publication contains a wealth of information on post-award management.

Topics include:

- Explanation of the framework that governs the management of post-award activities
- Detailed information on the Uniform Guidance
- Guidance on allowable costs
- Key issues of post-award management
- Coordination of roles and responsibilities for monitoring, reporting, cash management, prior approvals, compliance, and other activities

This 80+ page resource is available exclusively as a PDF for immediate download

https://onlinelearning.ncura.edu/read-and-explore
Innovative Tools for Change

Inclusive Human Centered Leadership

By Mario Medina and Saiqa Anne Qureshi

It can be tempting to only focus on implementing new systems or tools, or buying products to help manage metrics, particularly around productivity. However, the most important innovation in human centered leadership is actually an innovation in mind-set, as a leader. Implementing systems, using data to drive decisions, thinking about automation and tools to do so, are critical to leadership, but the framing of human centered leadership, focused on developing a responsive culture, being open to all ideas as having value, and lifelong learning is the critical tool to leadership success (Yeo, May 2020).

The future is capabilities-focused, and the driver of innovating that future, is human-centered at its core (Pacifico and Stokes, 2021). Shaping our future will involve leadership to influence organizational change and building an organizational framework through authenticity and intentionality. Building that organizational framework will require the development of DE&I discussions, metrics for measuring multidimensional leadership, and a road map that links to the organizations overall impact. A good approach to accomplishing this framework is that of inclusive human centered leadership. This framework distinguishes good leaders from great leaders, using the lens of inclusivity, and focusing on the leader’s ability to influence organizational behavior by setting the tone of organizational culture (Amin et al, 2018). Further research reveals that the most inclusive leaders value individuality, create a sense of belonging and build deep purpose and engagement in the organization (Heidrick).

Leadership is needed to attract and retain talent, to welcome a range of ideas and encourage new ways to work and collaborate. The tool is the senior leader, with a voice, a platform, a reflection of the culture and a driver of change. This focus includes supporting staff beyond their basic needs and creating a sense of belonging, but beyond that, shifting the culture around input and contribution away from a hierarchy of participation to one of equally valued contribution from all levels of staff. Allowing all to drive innovation, change, and seeing people not as a job title, or roles and responsibilities, but as individuals who can always be placed to support
innovation, not as cogs in a machine, doing work that could be automated. At the core of this is lifelong learning, the senior leader who continues to embrace the desire to learn something new, to be challenged and being public about learning and continuing to grow.

The much more difficult to measure soft skills, the socio-emotional awareness that drives deeper listening, is a critical factor in and telltale sign of inclusive leadership. Dawn Farrell discusses the need to listen and manage emotions - specifically the balance between being calm and passionate, as the key drivers of leadership (Heidrick). A leader who values individuality is careful to focus on the development of others and realizes that they themselves always have something to learn. This involves boldly seeking out new perspectives, forming strong relationships with a diverse range of individuals, playing to the diverse strengths of team members and supporting colleagues in ways that makes them comfortable bringing their authentic selves to work (Pacifico and Stokes, 2021).

From Heidrick’s decades of helping shape healthy, thriving cultures, we know that five key principles are at the core of a diverse and inclusive, human-centered culture:

- **Purposeful leadership.** This is driven from the “why” in an organization. This fundamental principal is the basis for leadership to “articulate a compelling, authentic story of why an inclusive, human-centric culture matters for the business, and then be role models for the desired behaviors and mindsets.”
- **Personal change.** Leaders demonstrate growth and speak to a narrative of growth and change through their personal narrative. In the workplace they identify, assess and change “outdated personal and organizational orthodoxies that can underlie exclusionary and toxic cultures, to drive strong positive change.

If human centered leadership is the future, then how do we support our leadership today to engage with that approach? According to a survey by McKinsey, 82% of C-Suite executives worldwide know that soft skills development for the next generation of leadership is critical to future planning and economic output (Yeo, April 2020). Hard skills are easier to measure, the return on investment more clear, and the measures of competence easier to set, while training and measuring soft skills is more difficult. There needs to be a broad approach, but on a personal level a leader seeking to develop these skills can do the following:

- **Broad engagement.** Leaders use a human-centered culture to “reinforce the cultural norms that shape new thinking and behavior in the organization.”
- **Systemic alignment.** Leaders ensure that “all of the people-related systems and processes of the organization reinforce the desired culture. This involves actively working to remove bias from those systems so that progress made around diversity, inclusion and human-centered leadership are not erased due to incongruent incentives, policies or practices.”
- **Representation.** True inclusivity calls for “a level of diversity appropriate for the aspirations and strategic objectives of the business,” and requires leaders to be “intentional in attracting, developing and sponsoring diverse talent so that they are able to thrive in the organization.”
• **Continually get to know yourself** - be open to new experiences, continue to evaluate your values. Consider the following questions:
  - What do I want and why?
  - What motivates me now?
  - Which values are most relevant in my life now?

• **Check in with your emotions** - allow yourself to stay connected. Consider the following questions:
  - What am I feeling?
  - How are my emotions showing up?
  - What are my triggers? Why do these events/people/words/behaviors trigger me?
  - When you are aware of those emotions, you can better regulate them and choose how to constructively express them.

• **Look at patterns in your life** - these patterns are driven by values and beliefs and create outcomes. Consider the following questions:
  - What kind of responses do I get from others?
  - When things didn’t go well, what was similar across situations?
  - What was I feeling in those moments and why?
  - How was I behaving on those occasions?

Critical to building this capacity is being introspective in terms of reflection and how behaviors impact others to engage change. The leader must build capacity within, to lead organizational change outside of themselves.

**References**


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Saiqa Anne Qureshi, PhD, MBA, is a sought-after speaker, trainer, editor and writer. She has more than a decade of experience in research management in both the US and Europe. She is an advocate for data driven decision making, and currently works for UCSF. She is also NCURA traveling faculty and a member of the NCURA Select Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, as well as adjunct faculty on the Master of Research Administration at John Hopkins University. She can be reached at SAQ@ucsf.edu

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**Research Management Review**

**Call for Articles**

The Research Management Review (RMR) would like to invite authors to submit article proposals. The online journal publishes a wide variety of scholarly articles intended to advance the profession of research administration. Authors can submit manuscripts on diverse topics.

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NSF’s Management Challenges for FY 2022

By Elizabeth Argeris Lewis

Each fall, we publish a “Management Challenges” report about the most important management and performance challenges facing the National Science Foundation. Several of these challenges overlap with challenges the recipient community faces.

NSF’s FY 2022 management challenges include:
- Increasing Diversity in Science & Engineering Education and Employment;
- Overseeing the United States Antarctic Program;
- Overseeing Grants in a Changing Environment;
- Managing the Intergovernmental Personnel Act Program;
- Overseeing Major Multi-User Research Facilities;
- Mitigating Threats Posed by Foreign Government Talent Recruitment Programs;
- Mitigating Threats Posed by the Risk of Cyberattacks; and
- Managing Transformational Change.

How do you decide what challenges to include in the report?
The Reports Consolidation Act of 2000 (Pub. L. No. 106-531) requires each agency’s inspector general to summarize what the inspector general considers to be the most serious management and performance challenges facing the agency and briefly assess the agency’s progress in addressing those challenges. We identify the challenges based on our audit and investigative work, as well as the work of the U.S. Government Accountability Office, the National Science Board, and NSF’s various advisory committees. When we determine an area is no longer a top management challenge, we remove it from the report.

Does NSF get a say in what the challenges are?
NSF provides comments on the challenges we identify, but it may not change them. Including a challenge means we believe the area warrants NSF’s highest level of attention—it does not mean we think NSF is doing a poor job addressing it. Our assessment of the most serious management challenges helps NSF clarify its goals. NSF’s responses to these challenges promote the integrity of NSF-funded projects, help ensure research funds are spent effectively and efficiently, and help maintain the highest level of accountability over taxpayer dollars.

How does NSF demonstrate, and OIG monitor, its progress?
In the report, we describe each challenge, NSF’s completed actions, and its ongoing actions to address the challenge. In its annual Agency Financial Report, NSF provides an update of its progress on addressing management challenges identified in the previous year. NSF may also meet with us periodically to talk about progress in addressing challenges or discuss specific criteria for removing a prior year challenge. We also ensure our annual audit work plan includes work to monitor NSF’s progress on current management challenges.

How does our Management Challenges report impact the recipient community?
Many institutions in the recipient community are continuing to address fiscal and operational challenges caused by the COVID-19 pandemic, which we cover within each applicable challenge area in the report. Our report also addresses the need to continue to increase diversity in science and engineering education and employment. According to NSF’s April 2021 report on Women, Minorities, and Persons with Disabilities, “Women, persons with disabilities, and some minority groups—Blacks or African Americans, Hispanics or Latinos, and American Indians or Alaska Natives—are underrepresented in science and engineering (S&E). That is, their representation in S&E education and S&E employment is smaller than their representation in the U.S. population.” In addition, the recipient community must continue to address risks posed by foreign government talent recruitment programs.

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INCLUSION INITIATIVES

Harnessing Digital Tools for Recruitment in Research Administration

Striving for DIVERSITY, EQUITY, and INCLUSION

By Saiqa Anne Qureshi and Marianne Woods

As the tools we use to recruit move more and more online and advertising moves to large platforms, such as LinkedIn, it is vital that we, as research administrators, harness these large platforms in an effective way in order to promote diversity, equity, and inclusion in hiring. While hiring patterns can reflect bias, and moving online does not move away from those biases, intentional decisions can be made to support inclusion of diverse populations when hiring. LinkedIn, as an example, is a fantastic tool, one used by many institutions of higher education, but if not used correctly, it will replicate social networks and not generate a talent pool that is diverse in nature. External job boards, like LinkedIn, are more likely to be used by women when job searching. While networks are more likely to be used by men to job search. Yet, the use of a tool such as LinkedIn can boost diversity of candidates (Ideal, 2021).

Research administrators need to look at how we approach recruitment tools and how we use them to create the most diverse and broad talent pool possible. An expanded talent pool gives the university the best opportunity to find and hire the best conceivable candidate. If previous sourcing strategies used by the university have not produced diverse slates in the past, they are unlikely to do so in the future (Cathey, 2021). Thus, the use of online tools that help produce diverse candidate pools will provide a range of benefits including broader skills, increased linguistic and cultural awareness, and a more varied talent pool and is essential to increasing diversity, equity and inclusion in the workforce. Afterall, diverse teams support higher revenue, innovative leaders, leadership in market segmentation, and becoming a destination of choice for employment (McConnell, 2020). Diversity recruitment is a practice of hiring candidates using a process that is free from bias, and it is merit based aiming to find the best candidates but structured to give all candidates an equal opportunity. Diversity is made up of two broad categories: (1) inherent diversity is made up of demographic factors (race, gender, age) and (2) acquired diversity refers to things that can evolve over time, such as education, experience, skills, and knowledge (McConnell, 2020).

Actively Sourcing Candidates

In addition to the use of recruitment tools, if you are actively searching for candidates there are some key ways to use search terms to ensure that you have a more diverse talent pool (Cathey, 2021; Huppert, 2018). As an example, one may need to search for specific institutions that have diverse student bodies, such as historically Black colleges and universities (HBCUs), minority serving institutions (MSIs), and tribal colleges. You can connect key terms with those key universities and the term “or” to search for them. You can use the same strategy related to other key demographic factors using sorority and fraternity names, including African-American, Latino and Asian-American Greek and fraternal organizations, LGBTQ+ friendly campus organizations, and veteran’s groups (Recruitment Brief, 2021). You can also add search alerts to custom filters to support finding candidates with a unique skill set when they enter the labor pool. You can also ensure elevation of your posting with key hashtags and LinkedIn groups that support inclusive hiring (Andreano, 2012).

An expanded talent pool gives the university the best opportunity to find and hire the best conceivable candidate.

Additionally, if using LinkedIn, you can use a new feature to hide names and photographs of potential candidates, reducing unconscious bias. There is significant bias against underrepresented minorities in terms of the number of initial invitations to interview and this feature attempts to reduce this bias (Srinivasan, 2021). Through correspondence experiments, where identical resumes were sent to the same job but with different names, we know that candidates in the United States perceived to be from non-
Diversity recruitment is a practice of hiring candidates using a process that is free from bias, and it is merit based aiming to find the best candidates but structured to give all candidates an equal opportunity.

It is also vital to reduce industry specific language to ensure that those with transferable skills consider your posting and widen your candidate pool, as well as to remove gendered and unconscious ableism terms that discourage the application of women and those with disabilities. (Recruitment Brief, 2021). There are a range of tools that can review a job description to support the removal of terms and reduce gendered language in particular, supporting a broader candidate pool to apply to a posting.

New Approaches
Increasing in popularity is the use of a “blind interview,” as a first-round interview screening tool. It is normally a text-based questionnaire, used as the first-round of interview, normally digitally accessed by the candidate. This tool asks questions, and this process removes bias around appearance and accent in the initial screening, also aiming to reduce unconscious bias against both women and minority candidates (McConnell, 2020).

Artificial Intelligence (AI) has been used to support resume screening, searching for key words and criteria to see if candidates meet the criteria (Ideal, 2021). It supports blind hiring as the criteria is being reviewed, and reduces unconscious bias around names, nation of origin, or religion (derived from name) are all removed. However, it can replicate bias in terms of the criteria actually being set. For instance, setting “years of experience” will allow the software to screen that for you, without bias; however, fewer women will apply for the role as they only apply where they meet the majority of the criteria, and if that criterion is not necessary then potentially viable candidates will be excluded by the AI system itself (Babcock, 2017).

Conclusion
As we continue to harness technology to support recruitment in Research Administration, it becomes more critical that we intentionally focus on inclusion as part of our strategy. We must aim to remove unconscious bias, question the criteria set for a role to query the barriers to entry that we create, and aim to promote positions with unbiased language to the widest range of candidates. Adding technology will not support those goals, and could rapidly increase bias, if we do not include its use with an intention to support diverse hiring.

References

Saiqa Anne Qureshi, PhD, MBA, is a sought-after speaker, trainer, editor, and writer. She has over a decade of experience in research management in both the US and Europe. She is an advocate for data driven decision making, and currently works for UCSE. She is also NCURA Traveling faculty, a member of the NCURA Select Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion, and also serves as adjunct faculty for Johns Hopkins University Masters of Research Administration program. Saiqa can be reached at s4q@ucsf.edu.

Marianne Woods, PhD, JD, is the Director of the Master of Science Program in Research Administration at Johns Hopkins University. She is an international specialist on all issues pertaining to research administration and has consulted and lectured on research administration issues throughout the world. She is often called upon by universities to consult on complex research administration issues ranging from misconduct in science to licensing of intellectual property. She is currently the Chair of NCURA’s Select Committee on Diversity, Equity, and Inclusion. In 2019 Dr. Woods received NCURA’s Distinguished Educator Award. In 2009 she was the recipient of NCURA’s highest honor, the Outstanding Achievement in Research Administration Award. She can be reached at mwoods9@jhu.edu.

English speaking minority groups, immigrants, those from the Latinx and African-American communities, and those with Muslim names are less likely to be called for an interview than those with what is perceived to be a “White American” name (Quillian et al., 2017). Using tools that can resume screen will remove the name and picture to reduce this unconscious bias.

As we continue to harness technology to support recruitment in Research Administration, it becomes more critical that we intentionally focus on inclusion as part of our strategy. We must aim to remove unconscious bias, question the criteria set for a role to query the barriers to entry that we create, and aim to promote positions with unbiased language to the widest range of candidates. Adding technology will not support those goals, and could rapidly increase bias, if we do not include its use with an intention to support diverse hiring.

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NCURA Magazine  January/February 2022 37
When we think about plagiarism, often our minds advance to the conclusion that an author’s work has been explicitly copied or stolen. However, that is not always the case. Plagiarism can take on many forms, ranging from blatant duplication to an unintentional error in citations. That said, for the purpose of this article, plagiarism can best be defined as taking someone else’s words or ideas and utilizing them in your own work without proper accreditation. When discovered, offenses of plagiarism can have long lasting effects, including, but not limited to, retraction of the publication in question.

There are obvious examples of plagiarism such as intellectual theft, which means to take someone else’s work and submit it as your own. However, there are much less obvious examples of plagiarism, as well. Faculty are under tremendous pressure, both professionally and financially, to publish their research and to publish it often. Under these circumstances, it is not uncommon to discover instances of accidental plagiarism. For example, improperly citing a source. When these instances are discovered, it is almost a guarantee that the published paper will ultimately be retracted.

Retracted papers ensue a domino effect. Not only does the author lose credibility with the publisher, but good research then becomes null and void. There are also financial consequences including loss or discontinuation of sponsored funding. These consequences impact the integrity of the individual researcher, as well as their affiliate institution.

Editors, publishers, and even authors, are leveraging technology to protect the integrity of research going forward. Platforms such as Crossref, formerly known as Similarity Check, operated by iThenticate, have cross checking capabilities against millions of publications and billions of web pages. These platforms perform scans to test for originality of work. The scan then provides a similarity score along with a breakdown of the similarity score for each individual source where similarities were flagged. Exact passages where there is suspicion of plagiarism are highlighted for an easy review. Furthermore, checking technology also offers insight as to what specifically may be missing from your work. This is helpful in those aforementioned circumstances where a source is improperly cited.

Complete originality is often quite difficult to achieve, especially in the field of scientific research, where methodologies are treated as law. That said, a threshold is typically set. For example, the Institute of Electrical and Electronics Engineers (IEEE) recommend a 30% similarity score threshold for plagiarism. A general rule of thumb states that a score of less than 5% for a single source is permissible. However, a score of over 10% warrants some investigating. Now, imagine attempting to examine for plagiarism without electronic tools. Such an endeavor would require the manual comparison of one paper with another. Plagiarism software reduces an exercise that could take days to just a few moments.

Publication of research brings forth its own level of inherent risk. Like other risks associated with research, it is impossible to completely eliminate risks associated with publication. However, also like other risks mentioned, it is possible to reduce, as well as manage risk going forward. Plagiarism-checking software allows us to not only detect errors prior to publication, but this data also allows us to gauge institutional knowledge and understanding surrounding plagiarism in research. This technology allows us to see firsthand areas in which we are falling short and where we need to educate our researchers and research administrators. It also protects our institution by flagging areas, as well as personnel, in noncompliance.
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All began with the COVID-19 Disaster in Japan
As the disaster of COVID-19 has restricted access to research laboratories and interaction among researchers at scientific conferences and symposia, the nature of research administrative support by URAs (University Research Administrators) has also changed.

In the midst of this disaster, there has been a growing momentum for the promotion of Digital Transformation (DX) by the Japanese government. According to news reports on COVID-19 responses in other countries around the world, it was well realized that while US and European countries around the world were making progress in digitizing their administrative systems, Japan’s government and universities were far behind. The delay in the response to the onset of COVID-19 outbreak might have caused the government to move forward with DX. Along with these government initiatives, in the name of promoting DX, there has been a rapid need to reform the workflow of URA.

Cooperation of URAs necessary to strengthen research capabilities
In the Times Higher Education World University Rankings, even the University of Tokyo, Japan’s top university, is ranked around 30th or 40th, with only the University of Tokyo and Kyoto University in the top 200. The University of Tokyo used to be the number one university in Asia, but now it ranks lower than Chinese and other Asian universities such as Tsinghua University and the National University of Singapore.

The government has also been working to strengthen the research capabilities of universities by hiring URAs in each university through programs such as the Research University Enhancement Program since almost 10 years ago. This has undoubtedly led to a certain amount of success in raising funds from various sources for Japanese universities. However, if Japanese universities only compete for the same pie in the domestic market, the science and technological activities of Japan as a whole will become deflated. This has not necessarily led to the strengthening of Japan’s overall research capabilities in comparison to the global level.

Under such circumstances, great expectations are placed on URAs to support research activities from the viewpoint of university management and research project management. The role of URAs in connecting universities and sectors such as industry-academia-government collaboration is beginning to expand. It is necessary to steer away from futile competition among domestic universities.
to cross-sectoral cooperation. In this case, I believe that the activities of URAs who connect universities with various sectors will become important.

However, it is not so easy to promote cooperation among URAs from different universities, as the tasks of URAs are becoming more diversified and its activities are expanding to various fields, not only the traditional limited scope of pre-award and post-award work. Each of the URA tasks does not follow a textbook and still depends on the experience of each URA and the ability of individual URA. This does not allow us to exceed the limits of the skills and abilities of each individual URA. Particularly, in research support activities that transcend organizational boundaries, it is difficult to simply rely on the activities of individual URAs, and it goes without saying that URAs from different universities and different sectors must share information, collaborate, and cooperate with each other.

Launching the MIRAI Project
With the support of the Ministry of Education, Culture, Sports, Science and Technology (MEXT), the Research University Consortium Japan (RUC), consisting of 36 research universities in Japan, has launched a project to introduce DX to research support activities by URAs. In particular, RUC will build a DX platform to support the workflow of URAs in planning, implementing, and following up on “joint research that transcends the boundaries of disciplines and institutions.” We have named this the MIRAI Project (MIRAI = Multi-disciplinary trans-Institutional Research Assistance Initiative). MIRAI, which means “future” in Japanese, is an initiative that aims to build the future of Japanese universities by DX for the workflow of URAs and enhancing international competitiveness through cooperation among universities. In this way, the URAs of the participating institutions of RUC will act as the glue to promote “joint research that transcends the boundaries of disciplines and institutions.

Zoom, Miro, and Slack: Online tools for URA cooperation
From April 30, 2021, URAs from 36 RUC universities are experimenting with a process to build a research team by bringing information on potential future collaborators, discussing with each other, and building a research team under the common theme of “Post-COVID-19”. As a result, 113 researchers and accompanying URAs from 36 universities have participated in the MIRAI project, and they are planning research teams that transcend the boundaries of disciplines and institutions while communicating online.

For URAs to cooperate, the use of online digital tools is essential. A variety of online communication tools were necessary for online communication, such as Zoom for holding online meetings, Miro for poster sessions using online sharing boards, and Slack for information exchange among groups.

When we conducted a survey of URAs participating in the MIRAI project about the use of these online tools, virtually all respondents answered that they were useful. On the other hand, however, we also found out that there are some issues such as the difficulty of managing confidential research information in online tools. We have also learned that there is a need for researchers to interact not only online, but also face-to-face offline.

In fact, when the URAs who participated in the MIRAI project were surveyed (41 respondents, multiple answers possible), 46% of them answered that online tools are cumbersome because they need to be checked frequently. In addition, 39% of the URAs were concerned about the range of sharing research information. Furthermore, 54% felt that offline as well as online events were necessary for research exchange, while 44% needed smooth facilitation of online communication, and 42% wanted proper management of confidential information online.

Expectations for the Future of MIRAI project
After sorting out these and other issues and conducting trials in fiscal 2021, we plan to introduce our own MIRAI-DX platform in the next fiscal year. It is expected that the DX of the URA workflow in Japan will be further advanced in the future, contributing to the strengthening of the research capabilities of Japanese universities.

In promoting the MIRAI project, I would like to thank the core university members of the RUC for MIRAI project (Tohoku University, University of Tsukuba, Tokyo Institute of Technology, University of Electro-Communications, Kyoto University, Okayama University, and the National Institutes of Natural Sciences) and all participants for the MIRAI project.
While some institutions converted to a hybrid model in the aftermath of the COVID-19 de-densification of campuses (a model in which employees are locally sourced and come into the office a couple of days a week) more and more institutions are hiring nationally or even internationally, allowing their teams to work fully remotely and in some instances, across time zones. While working remote has brought institutions and employees many benefits including reduced commuting time, lower real estate costs and better work-life balance, it also brings unique challenges that compel us to find new ways to foster meaningful connections and ensure continued professional career development and enterprise growth of the research support workforce.

Be intentional about interactions
Both institutions and employees need to be intentional about hybrid or remote work situations. For institutions, making sure activities and programs are inclusive, from both human resources and operational perspectives, to ensure no remote workers are left behind or aside, is critical. Successful programs might include targeted mentoring programs in which established mentors are specifically assigned to mentees to help answer questions and work on joint projects together. Depending on the situation and input needed from participants, small consistent virtual group interactions often work better than larger virtual meetings. Providing people opportunities or encouraging them to communicate one on one or in small groups may also help people open up in larger group meetings. Whatever the response from the institution, the programs need to be intentional, and regularly revamped to ensure employees are satisfied. For employees, try investing in all kinds of work relationships, both within and outside your immediate sphere, where finding connections can be particularly fruitful in terms of personal and professional growth. Recognizing colleagues’ personal updates, career milestones, and “wins” will generate the social connective threads a virtual workplace might lack. Taking every opportunity to meet in person whenever possible, for example at conferences, is also critical.

Social connections are important
We are social creatures, regardless of whether we are introverts or extroverts.

When we are in the same physical office, we run into each other in the hallway and get into “watercooler conversations” naturally. We build trust when we know each other on both a personal and professional level. During an in-person group meeting, we tend to start chatting with each other before a meeting begins; in a virtual group meeting, we tend to mute ourselves and wait for the meeting to begin and there is little to no personal conversation. To counteract this, meeting facilitators can try some fun check-in questions before diving into business topics to start the virtual meeting with a personal connection. Often the pre-meeting can generate some fun conversations and important work-related information can bubble up at the same time. Or during meetings, allow folks to go “off agenda” from time to time, if needed, to help generate a strong camaraderie between teammates. If time is limited for a large group meeting, start the meeting with a two-word check-in to allow everyone to articulate something that is on their mind in that moment. Meaningful engagements outside of the immediate workspace are also important to the mental health of the remote workforce. For example, by volunteering to raise guide dog puppies, joining a parent/infant group, or engaging in community civic organizations, workers can ensure they get their social interactions met outside the office when they’re not having face to face contact during the workday.

Getting to know each other on a personal level will help lighten the mood of a physical or virtual room and improves our communications and connections. Personal matters affect our business selves. Our lives can’t be completely and clearly divided into work and personal. We want to feel comfortable bringing our whole selves to the workplace, sharing exciting personal news and updates, and releasing the pressure value on a strained mind in a safe space when needed. Social communications help us connect, focus, and achieve our highest potential at work.

Investment in tools and infrastructure is key
Technology (Zoom, Microsoft Teams, Skype, Slack to name few) has enabled institutions to offer employees more flexibility at work so that we can meet, chat, and collaborate, no matter where we are in the world. It is important to ensure that these tools are used most effectively in remote working.
situations, and coupled with other communication software, such as virtual whiteboards or other tools, so that everyone feels like they can contribute to a meeting, whether they are remote or in person.

While software is contributing to our connectiveness, having a safe, comfortable, and ergonomic setup in the home office can increase productivity. Investing in infrastructure for employees’ home offices may be a new obstacle for institutions and creates both financial and logistic challenges. However, helping employees to have the most productive setup can go a long way in increasing employee appreciation and work productivity, and can also ensure savings on physical work locations for the institution. Other operational considerations for the remote world include metrics and productivity reports, maintaining security and confidentiality for remote employees and their data, and HIPPA or other confidential research requirements.

**Productivity increased - how to measure using metrics**
What should productivity look like in a virtual job? People in their seats in front of the computer between 8-5, or getting the work done efficiently and effectively without a prescribed, fixed working schedule? The answer certainly would be “it depends.” It depends on the role and the institution’s culture and operational needs. But flexibility should be afforded when it can be, to give employees the ownership of their time, set their goals and how they’d like to get the work done. For those who would like to engage in real time communications without messaging delays or scheduling a formal meeting, managers might try setting up a few hours in a day or week as open office hours during which people can reach out. Metrics and performance assessments might need to change, adapt, and reflect the changing work environment. It is important to remind ourselves of our ultimate goals in supporting researchers in securing research funding to advance science and technology while not being bogged down by prescribed methods and manmade metrics in assessing job performances.

**Leadership sets the tone**
Managing in person and virtually are different. While the demand for working remotely has been increasing, some managers are struggling in managing virtually because we can’t simply see whether someone is in their office working or not during the office hour. However, this is where trust and setting the tone from the outset comes in. Employees who perform at a high level in traditional office settings will find ways to adapt and perform well virtually. Have the trust in people, come up with goals and metrics that will keep people on track in terms of performance and share the expectations for remote work clearly. This is a dramatically changed workforce and will need new ways of leading.

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Kim Holloway, PhD, (she/her), Vice Provost for Research Development at Northeastern University in Boston, MA, is charged with growing the research enterprise across the institution’s growing global network, comprising campuses in 3 continents. Kim’s responsibilities at Northeastern include strategic research initiatives, faculty professional development and integration of research at all Northeastern locations. She can be reached at k.holloway@northeastern.edu.

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The purpose of the Program is to create opportunities for NCURA members, faculty, and staff to innovate and pursue excellence in developing and sustaining critical partnerships and include but are not limited to:

- Supporting the data-driven needs of NCURA and the profession;
- Identifying, developing and implementing innovative programs for research and education; and
- Building resources for new partnership programs that support global efforts.

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If you have worked in research administration for any length of time you have likely accumulated stories of last-minute proposal assistance requests, proposals missing critical institutional involvement, and overall poor communication from faculty members. Although situations such as these will arise regardless of immaculate planning, can we take simple steps to foster an environment of collaboration between research administrators and PIs? Yes—and we believe this can best be described as mentorship.

While faculty members may have formal research mentorships, a solid relationship with a research administration professional can be instrumental in their development as responsible researchers.

Why are we talking about a mentoring relationship? Because you have the professional knowledge. You know the landscape of the university or institute. You have knowledge that will make the PI’s journey easier and more fruitful. Our focus here is to lay out simple strategies that research administrators can implement with new or junior faculty members, as building a strong relationship early will pay large dividends later.

The First Meeting
Although you may already be introducing yourself to new faculty members by email or at unit staff meetings, we recommend building a more intentional connection between yourself and the PI by meeting with each individually. New faculty members starting their careers are excited to embark on their own projects. Faculty members transferring from other institutions may assume that your processes are the same as those at their former institution. At your first one-on-one meeting, establish your interest in their work: Ask the PI to explain their research in layman’s terms and provide you with key words so that you can better assist with connecting them to the broader university/institute network. The key of the first meeting is to establish yourself as a resource and use that opportunity to set the tone of the partnership. Cover critical areas, such as:

- Timelines for proposal review and components such as cost-share review, F&A waiver requests, etc.
- Communication expectations. How and when do they want communication from you and vice versa?
- Resources/offices should they be in contact with.
- Post award management and who is responsible for the management of awards.

Don’t be afraid to set boundaries about what you can and cannot do. If the tone you set is that you are a safe person to “ask the silly question to,” you will foster an environment where faculty members ask questions early. Follow up with a summary email.

The key of the first meeting is to establish yourself as a resource and use that opportunity to set the tone of the partnership.

The First Proposal
The first proposal they work on with you may very well be their FIRST proposal. Many graduate programs do not have courses on how to write a grant and there is no guarantee that they were mentored in grant writing during their post-graduate training. If junior faculty members have experience in proposal writing, often
To serve our institutional goals and research community needs, institutions must maintain effective research administration operations. To achieve this, NCURA Peer Programs encourages institutions to conduct regular assessments on the effectiveness of their institutional research administration program.

These assessments should focus on many areas spanning across the institution:
- Institutional planning and investment;
- Enterprise component and structure;
- Faculty engagement and burden;
- Policy and risk assessment;
- Systems and data management;
- Research partnerships and associations;
- Research development and options;
- Sponsored projects operations; and
- Compliance.

An assessment should formally document institutional strengths, opportunistic areas, as well as include recommendations and action plans to ensure achievement of institutional goals. When developing recommendations and action plans, institutions often think of improving upon their policies, procedures, systems, personnel, training and communications.

Given advances in technology and newer trends, institutions should also consider disruptive innovations. Disruptive Innovations challenge our current technology and way of thinking while searching for better options or solutions. While some disruptive innovations do not pertain to the research administration enterprise, the Top 2021 Disruptive Innovations which can benefit research administration include:
- Robotics and Automated Systems—While many of our processes are manual, institutions should consider automating processes which ensure consistency, improved processing times, and reliance on systems. Automation will enable professionals to focus on more complex tasks which can’t be automated.
- “As-a-service computing”—Historically, institutions utilized systems maintained on servers which resulted in large information technology groups and redundancies from one institution to another. As-a-service computing provides scalable, on-demand, cloud-based solutions developed to meet the needs of the industry thus eliminating the need for redundant personnel, hardware and maintenance at each institution.
- Work from home—The pandemic has prompted an exponential growth in work from home, a flexible, cost-efficient strategy deployed as a result of technology advancements. While this benefits employer and employee, it also frees up institutional space which can be repurposed to meet needs of the researcher community.

An assessment should formally document institutional strengths, opportunistic areas, as well as include recommendations and action plans to ensure achievement of institutional goals. When developing recommendations and action plans, institutions often think of improving upon their policies, procedures, systems, personnel, training and communications.

Given advances in technology and newer trends, institutions should also consider disruptive innovations. Disruptive Innovations challenge our current technology and way of thinking while searching for better options or solutions. While some disruptive innovations do not pertain to the research administration enterprise, the Top 2021 Disruptive Innovations which can benefit research administration include:
- Robotics and Automated Systems—While many of our processes are manual, institutions should consider automating processes which ensure consistency, improved processing times, and reliance on systems. Automation will enable professionals to focus on more complex tasks which can’t be automated.
- “As-a-service computing”—Historically, institutions utilized systems maintained on servers which resulted in large information technology groups and redundancies from one institution to another. As-a-service computing provides scalable, on-demand, cloud-based solutions developed to meet the needs of the industry thus eliminating the need for redundant personnel, hardware and maintenance at each institution.
- Work from home—The pandemic has prompted an exponential growth in work from home, a flexible, cost-efficient strategy deployed as a result of technology advancements. While this benefits employer and employee, it also frees up institutional space which can be repurposed to meet needs of the researcher community.

This is limited to the research narrative; components such as budgets or facilities statements maybe unfamiliar to them. When working on a faculty member’s first proposal, ensure you have a clear understanding of their past experience and then provide them with appropriate resources. This may mean connecting them with other offices within your institution (such as research development or research safety) or connecting them with experienced faculty members who are willing to provide example documents. Encourage them to reach out to the program officer or director to clarify terms of the funding opportunity and discuss the scope of work.

[Side Note: Do not assume your experienced faculty members have it all figured out. One of us recently worked with a PI with 20+ years’ experience with NIH—but we were submitting an NSF proposal and did not realize until days before that they did not have an NSF ID!]

“Establish a clear and open line of communication”

Post-Award

You have successfully guided a new faculty member through the proposal process and received notice of funding—congratulations! Continue to build your relationship by sending a note of congratulations and identifying critical next steps. As with proposal writing, new faculty members may have little to no experience with running a project or monitoring a budget. This is an excellent time to establish clear processes and provide easy-to-understand guidance about items such as reports, compliance, and appropriate spending.

Moving forward together

Overall, being innovative in your approach to working with faculty members can sometimes be just going back to basics. Be specific about when and where you can help and when it is essential that you are notified. Establish a clear and open line of communication, and you will help faculty avoid the common pitfalls and missteps that occur while pursuing research funding.

Jennifer Lawrence is Administrative Operations Manager for the Department of Neuroscience at the University of Arizona, managing finance and research administration for more than 30 years. She earned her MBA from the University of Arizona. Jennifer is a long-time NCURA member and is grateful for the advice and expertise shared throughout the profession. She can be reached at jillawren@arizona.edu.

BreeAnn Brandhagen, PhD, currently serves as the Senior Research Development Associate at Colorado State University. She received her PhD from the University of South Dakota. Prior to CSU, she served as the Program Manager for BioSNIR, an interdisciplinary research center in South Dakota. BreeAnn provides guidance for complex proposal development and manages strategic research initiatives for CSU. She can be reached at breeann.brandhagen@colostate.edu.
COVID-19 changed the world profoundly and impacted many millions of people through death, loss, grief, and change. For some the change was welcome and brought professional and personal fulfilment. Throughout the pandemic the Region VIII executive committee met at least monthly to work our way through our agendas. We focused on ideas about how to engage in creative ways that would not have considered prior to 2020. However, the part of the meeting that we all looked forward to the most was just to say hello to each other from across the other side of the world and share our stories about what was happening around us.

We have distilled a bit of our lives to share with you.

Getting to Know Our Region VIII Colleagues at a Deeper Level

By Lisa Kennedy

Bruno Woeran
Paracelsus Medical Private University (PMU), Salzburg, Austria
Position: Head Research & Innovation Management, CEO PMU-I Ltd.
NCURA affiliation: Chair, Region VIII, Member since 2012

Having worked for the past 8 years in Finland, accepting a new position with PMU in the beginning of 2020, with a planned start in May of 2020, I did not know what I was in for just then and there. Over the next two years, I would move countries during a pandemic where I would work from home doing two jobs. With the relocation, the challenge of finding a new home and relocating during lockdown ran in parallel with a plethora of projects ongoing, getting to know new colleagues, co-workers, and a new work environment with medical and clinic topics… just to name a few.

This was definitely a new era for all of us, while differing for those who spent more time one in this work environment. Those who have been able to profit from long-stemming relationships established over the years across disciplines, organizations, and networks were able to ‘hold on’ for a little while longer by sending social media messages, short emails, or making a quick phone call across the globe. They were able to move forward in getting tasks completed and receive necessary information to proceed with a pending decision. While others who were new to this profession of research management and administration and have to rely on their fellow colleagues with more experience to learn, exchange knowledge, and build on their own networks faced more challenges connecting even with Zoom.

Hence, in my opinion, creating, sustaining, and expanding knowledge exchange, networks, and sharing of information has become more crucial than ever. This holds true for in-house work codices, policies, and procedures, as well as contracting, exchanging, and working across the globe. With NCURA Global being one such connection, my hope is that we can sustain and expand on our strong network to continue to improve the international work life—especially with inspiring in person meetings again.
Ioannis Legouras enjoying the autumn colors from his new office. Having moved to a new building during the pandemic, the concept of the new office remained quite abstract for some time.

Across the globe face masks and social distancing became the new office standard once individuals returned from teleworking.

Elly Pineda
The University of New South Wales, Australia
Position: Research Hub Business Manager
NCURA affiliation: Region VIII member

COVID-19 and the adaptations we made changed my life—it undoubtedly disrupted daily routines, created anxieties around work, and in the case of Australia the higher education sector was devastated due to border closures impacting most international students.

Welcome positive experiences included slowing from the hustle and bustle of getting to and from and providing more opportunity to work from home and increase quality time with significant others. I live in Sydney—Australia’s largest city. While we didn’t experience the world’s longest lockdown, Sydney-siders (people residing in Sydney) were in a lockdown for almost four months. The strict rules were enough to make you go nuts, but adapting to work from home was a welcome chance for change to the traditional office environment. We experienced significant job losses in the education section since many of these could not be performed remotely. I, however, was fortunate to have kept and found a new job during the pandemic.

For the foreseeable future, the flexibility in the hybrid working environment is envisioned at my university and a welcome opportunity for many. In a virtual space, we continue connect and collaborate using innovative technologies. We are also setting aside team meetings for personal sharing. I am grateful to be part of a team that reinforces supportive network, promotes open dialogue, and encourages work-life balance within the hybrid working model. As lockdown restrictions ease in Sydney and we move forward into a new year there’s no question we will continue to go through a period of unease.

Ioannis Legouras
The Max Delbrück Center for Molecular Medicine in the Helmholtz Association (MDC), Berlin, Germany
Position: Head of International Programs
NCURA affiliation: Treasurer, Region VIII, Member since 2018

I have been working at the MDC since 2012 where I have accompanied many changes in the organization, be it modernization of processes, improvement of procedures, or simply adaptation and incorporation of new tools. However, no other external factor has had such a catalytic effect on the speed of introducing new policies than the pandemic. Within a few months, a large part of the working reality had changed. Virtual meetings which were a rare occurrence became a routine that everyone adapted quickly so that a new way of interpersonal communication emerged. The “distance” was tough. It took its toll on most people even if some found it not so difficult. I have noticed that some colleagues liked the increase of personal space and the possible loss of a strong team dynamic. They felt that individualism got more pronounced.

For me, two elements that stand out as significant are digitalization and flexibility. The process of digitalization in Germany has been considerably slower compared to other countries. It was quite refreshing and motivating to notice how years of discussions and long lines of argumentation were accelerated in a short period of time. Many people were used to working with printouts all the time, and as soon as this was not possible, they switched to the digital format. In grants administrations, the change was not only for the research institutions, but funding agencies also had to quickly adapt to accept electronic signatures or e-mails as confirmations than before.

Concerning flexibility, we learned that the remote work environment, despite its disadvantages of distancing colleagues, can have a positive impact on the quality of life and provide more emotional balance. Many people have saved hours on a daily basis without commuting to the office. We also found that much of the work can be done in the comfort of home. It is my opinion that it was a very positive innovative signal that many organizations have opt for a hybrid model where employees can work from the home office a couple of days per week.

It has definitely been a challenge to try to meet new people and expand our network in these covid times. Nevertheless, it is crucial to invest in knowledge exchange both nationally and internationally. I am very happy that the Region VIII of NCURA has never ceased to be active in the past year and a half and continues to contribute with valuable new projects and ideas to all its members.

Makram Halawani
American University of Beirut, Beirut, Lebanon
Position: Assistant Director
NCURA affiliation: Chair Elect, Region VIII, Member since 2011

COVID-19 and the adaptations we made changed my life because I was introduced, rather compelled, to resort to new ways in conducting business and addressing day to day tasks. The home office routine that I have to deal with, and I am sure others like me can relate, gave a different perspective on how to see people, and listen and learn while communicating with stakeholders and organizational units. Put differently: it produced a new norm of discipline. I was made aware of legal considerations, authorizations, and e-document certifications that I otherwise didn’t have to deal with.
While some things will stay this way for the foreseeable future, such as masked colleagues or our neo-meetings style from applications on laptops and mobile devices. Other activities that we have accepted as “Redundant” when our in-person processes are now accepted with the e-assisted solution. While we learned the hard way to accept email approvals over a routing forms for physical signatures, we will be the better for it. Surely, our new eating habits will stick with us for a while and the two meters distance greetings of “hello and goodbye”; hopefully and wishfully not for too long.

But otherwise, I’m looking forward to never having to wear a mask again by maximum next year and not having to confine myself to a home-workspace, where I will pleasantly accept it as an option rather than the only choice.

Lisa Kennedy
The University of Queensland (UQ),
Brisbane, Australia
Position: Director Research Partnerships
NCURA affiliation: Secretary, Region VIII, Member since 2018

COVID-19 changed campus life dramatically. As we started to filter back to work after Christmas 2019, news of an outbreak of a deadly virus was discussed in hallways, meetings, and social media. UQ had signed a contract with the Coalition for Epidemic Preparedness Innovations in December 2018. Little did we know when we negotiated the contract to develop the technology to create a rapid response vaccine in a hypothetical outbreak situation that we would be flung into a real-world crisis just twelve months later.

Supporting the scientists as they worked night and day often meant that we also worked around the clock to keep pace with contractual negotiations. The rest of the world adapted to working from home, while I adjusted to the strange feeling of being on campus in empty offices. No students, only one or two colleagues in distant buildings. No cafes, no coffee. Eek.

So adaptation meant bringing my own coffee to work. I have continued to do so, even now when everyone is back and the St. Lucia campus is again a vibrant place to be. Our work on the vaccine continues, but the technology has changed. Additionally, the frenetic sense that we had to go as fast as we could to save lives has dissipated. The vaccine UQ is developing will save lives, but in the interim, there are other vaccines that have filled the void.

This week we were finally able to shed our masks. Queensland is about to hit the 80% double-dose vaccination target and overseas students will be back on campus in 2022.

“...because the crux of our challenges is not the vaccine, but the vaccine is the only way we can save lives.”

Lisa J. Kennedy, BSW, MSWAP, is the Director Research Partnerships at The University of Queensland (UQ). UQ is one of Australia’s leading research and teaching institutions with more than 55,000 students and consistently ranked in the top four Australian universities for research income. Lisa is also the Secretary of NCURA’s Region VIII. She can be reached at l.kennedy@uq.edu.au

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Getting innovative. Getting connected.

Can you believe the Education Scholarship Fund was started more than 10 years ago? Since the fund’s inception in 2011, NCURA members have continued to support colleagues by offering scholarships to those pursuing their graduate education in research administration. The “even a little makes a difference” slogan continues to be used in communication and publicity for the fund, and members go out of their way to be sure their donations are made and available raffle tickets are purchased.

The Education Scholarship Fund Select Committee has seen some significant changes over the years, but nothing compares to the effect the pandemic has had on the opportunity to fundraise. At the beginning of 2021, the committee wasn’t sure if fundraising was going to be an option at all due to the uncertainty of an in-person Annual Meeting, our only fundraising opportunity each year. The committee reviewed where we were financially to determine if scholarships would be reduced or even made at all. Thankful for years of successful fundraising by the committee and generous support of NCURA membership, we were able to award four scholarships to our NCURA colleagues during 2021.

As the year progressed, our committee focused on generating innovative ways to build relationships with the current masters of research administration programs and developing a plan to ensure we reach a diverse pool of students. Subcommittees were created to focus on our goals. We expanded our approach from “how do we raise money?” to “how do we form lasting connections?” We worked on an innovative plan to reach our colleagues, determine what materials would be helpful to share, and ensure scholarship information is passed along to actual students, who may or may not be existing NCURA members. We looked for ways to reach out and help to build new NCURA members through their application to the scholarship fund.

In the fall of 2021, our NCURA family returned to D.C. for its in-person Annual Meeting. It was a much smaller group than previous years, but we saw the generous spirit and support for the scholarship fund that we had seen in years passed. Raising more than $3,000, we surpassed our goal and were able to secure enough for at least one scholarship.

With the committee moving into a new year with new opportunities, be on the lookout for even more innovative ideas from this group as we expand upon the progress made in 2021. We’re looking forward to continuing to support our NCURA colleagues in their pursuit of a masters in research administration.

...our committee focused on generating innovative ways to build relationships with the current masters of research administration programs and developing a plan to ensure we reach a diverse pool of students.

For more information about the Education Scholarship Fund, please visit us at:
www.ncura.edu/esf
The NCURA Resource Center is your source for the best of NCURA’s Magazine, Journal, YouTube Tuesday and Podcast resources. In addition, members will be writing for the NCURA Resource Center so look for new content!

We look forward to your feedback and comments!

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Imagine this: Oars cutting water in a splashing symphony as the boat moves ahead. The rowers harmonize their strokes, inching closer and closer to their destination. Each rower has their own strength but the team has worked hard to figure out how they complement each other. It’s crunch time—the last minutes of the race are the toughest but the crew rely on each other. Motivated, they cross the finish line. Did they win the gold? Well, there really isn’t a gold medal for research administration. For our newly formed Departmental Research Administration team, which assembled a few months before the infamous COVID-19 pandemic, it certainly felt a bit like a crew race as we worked together to move our team toward the finish of our first year.

We are a multigenerational and multicultural team of seven. Each individual contributes not just the required skills for the job, but also their character, their life experiences, their culture, and their unique approach. Some of our more seasoned members contribute leadership and historical perspective. Newer members contribute fresh ideas, technical savvy, a meticulous eye for detail, and new perspectives. This diversity has now become a part of our team identity.
and has immensely contributed to our strengths. Nevertheless, what we just outlined as our strengths, have also posed some challenges for us when it comes to collaborating effectively. While diversity in perspective, personalities, background, and expertise is important (indeed this is what springs innovation!), we had to work hard to figure out our shared goals and common philosophy. We had figure out how to collaborate effectively. We believe learning how to collaborate effectively is the key to a new team’s success and productivity, especially in departmental research administration. Think about it: Unless, all team members are rowing in the same direction in harmony, no matter how strong or skilled each member is individually, the boat wouldn’t move! Rather, the crew would just tire out, or worse, burn out. We want to give you a little glimpse into the boat ride of our first year as a newly formed research administration team (at the Department of Molecular and Human Genetics at the Baylor College of Medicine). We are hoping that sharing our challenges and successes in fostering collaboration will inspire you to harness collaborative power in your team.

A bit of background: We serve quite a large department—more than $100 million dollars in funding, 515 faculty, staff, and trainees, and in the year 2020 alone, 428 grant proposals were submitted by our department for funding. Research administration has always been a big part of our department, but centralization is new.

To start off, as a new team with existing members of the department and some new members, we worked on building relationships with each other. We also established rapport with departmental faculty and the administrative staff they work closely with. Building internal relationships within the team is how we began to learn how to collaborate. From our inception, we started to meet weekly (virtually), not just formally but also informally (we have virtual Taco Tuesdays every week). These informal meetings act as team building catalysts, providing us with a safe haven for all of our team to voice concerns, brainstorm ideas, and sometimes just to vent (which we all know is sometimes needed in research administration). These meetings also bridged any communication gaps we had via email or from formal meetings. Indeed, we have solved many problems during these informal meetings, such as coming up with new workflows and distribution workloads to prevent burnout. On the other hand, formal meetings allowed us to focus on technical matters such as propagating shared team goals and projects, exchanging knowledge, assessing progress, and collaborating with other departmental and central administrative units. In the process of learning how to collaborate, we’ve gotten to know each other as people with families, challenges, and pressures that we face outside the office. Our team has become not just a work tool to get the job done, but also a support system. In turn, a positive, supportive work environment with individuals who genuinely care about and respect each other has fostered an exceptionally productive team. As a result of having an internally supportive team who learned how to collaborate, we were able to build better relationships with departmental faculty and staff, conduct a high volume of grant reviews, streamline processes and create SOPs for various pre- and post-award processes (carryforwards, NCES, JITs etc.), collectively manage more than $18 million in grant funding (post-award), and become Certified Research Administrators within one year.
That may seem like an oversimplification, but figuring out how to collaborate within a team can be powerful. Jim Tamm, who is an expert in building collaborative workplace environments, as well as a former judge, spoke about the importance of learning how to collaborate effectively in his book, *Radical Collaboration: Five Essential Skills to Overcome Defensiveness and Build Successful Relationships*, as well as in one of his TED Talks. In his TED Talk, “Cultivating Collaboration: Don’t Be So Defensive!” Tamm explains that there are two types of work environments, green zone and red zone. Red zone environments are adversarial and internally competitive. Such attitudes can spread like a “virus in an organization” or a department, ultimately weakening morale and diminishing productivity (Tamm, 2015). Conversely, green zone environments are “supportive, cooperative, and highly skilled in collaboration,” like a winning crew team. Such an environment ultimately results in more productivity (Tamm, 2015).

In the process of assembling together, our group has learned an incredible amount from each other. Most importantly, we have learned how to collaborate. We have learned to row in synchrony and harmony, playing on each other’s strengths and compensating when one of us is fatigued. To do so, we’ve had to listen to each other’s points of view and make unified decisions, even when we disagree. We have also worked to ensure that all team members are heard. We have learned how to attack the problem and not each other. Individually, we are strong, but together we are a powerhouse crew.

References
Deciphering information and putting clues together to discover solutions to various challenges is an integral part of being a Research Administrator. Working collaboratively on clever innovative solutions can help solve the mystery of topics such as successful proposal development and submission; hybrid work arrangements; efficient financial reporting; nurturing global collaborations; data for decision making; federal regulations; compliance; and working in diverse teams. What may seem “puzzling” at first grows clearer as we share our knowledge and expertise with our peers. Help us ‘Crack the Code’ to the challenges and opportunities in our new world of working at AM64!
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**NCURA Member Milestones**

**Tolise Dailey** is now Financial Research Compliance/Training Officer at Colorado State University.

**Sandra Logue, MA, CRA**, past PDC Chair and past Region VII Chair, is now the Senior Research Administrative Director for the USC Mark and Mary Stevens Neuroimaging and Informatics Institute at Keck School of Medicine.

**Robyn Remotigue, MPPA, CRA**, is now the Executive Director, Office of Research Services, School of Public Health at the University of North Texas Health Science Center at Fort Worth.

**David Schultz** is now the Assistant Vice President for Sponsored Research Administration at the University of Houston.

Do you have a milestone to share? Email schiffman@ncura.edu

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Craig A. Reynolds
Assistant Vice President for Research – Sponsored Projects
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NCURA
Supporting Research...together™
Greetings, Salutations and a Very Happy New Year from Region II! 2021 was an exciting hybrid/virtual adventure for all of us and I would like to thank the Steering Committee for all of their hard work. In particular, many thanks to the outgoing officers and committee chairs for their hard work, dedication, and guidance: Catherine Parker (Chair), Katie McKeon (Immediate Past Chair), Berlin Bermudez (Secretary), Lamar Oglesby (Immediate Past Treasurer), and Jaquion Gholston (PDC).

The 2022 Regional Officers are: Adam Greenberg (Chair) Catherine Parker (Immediate Past Chair), Lamar Oglesby (Chair-Elect), Meena Ilyas (Secretary), and Gabriela Anglon (Treasurer). The Steering Committee will include our elected officers and the following committee chairs: Chea Smith (PDC); Jared Littman (Mentor Me); Laura Kingsley (Regionally Elected National Board Member), and Sandy Collier (Program Committee). I look forward to working with all of the Steering Committee and standing committee members in the coming year.

2022 will be a productive year filled with virtual PDC workshops, networking events, new member orientations, a brand-new website, and other member engagement activities. To accomplish all of this and more, we rely on the wonderful volunteers from our membership. If you are looking to get involved within the Region (and I encourage everyone to do so), please reach out to our Chair-Elect, Lamar Oglesby, lo170@research.rutgers.edu or myself, and we can work with you to find a volunteer opportunity in our Region that matches your interests and talents!

I am most excited for the return of our in-person regional meeting taking place at the Hotel Dupont in Wilmington Delaware from November 6-9, 2022. For more information or to volunteer in the planning of the Regional Meeting, please contact Sandy Collier at collier@umd.edu. This is an amazing opportunity to meet people throughout the region and see what goes into planning our amazing conferences.

Look out for announcements on the web, Facebook, and in e-blasts as we move forward into the year.

Additionally, I ask members to:

- Join our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/groups/ncuraregionii
- Join the Region II Community on NCURA’s Collaborate: https://collaborate.ncura.edu/communities/community-home?communitykey=8e4f210c-9468-4adc-a1bd-18a950e5be70&tab=groupdetails

Sonya Stern is the Chair of Region I and serves as Director, Sponsored Project Administration at the University of Vermont. She can be reached at Sonya.Stern@uvm.edu.

With 2021 behind us, we are collectively looking forward to 2022 with hope and optimism. Throughout 2021, many institutions were faced with the task of switching to a different mode of operation than the one they had before the pandemic or throughout 2020. Some chose to go fully remote, others called everyone back into the office, and many settled on a hybrid model. These changes created unique and significant challenges for Region I institutions and our colleagues. Sensing a need among our members to connect, learn and rejuvenate, we offered a virtual conference in November entitled Together Toward Tomorrow, Focusing on What Matters.

I am excited to be working closely with the members of Region I and the Advisory Board to make 2022 a success! I am confident that we will not only continue with the traditional professional development offerings throughout the year, but also continue to re-imagine how Region I engages with and reaches out to its colleagues and members. I welcome any and all feedback from you on how we can amplify our purpose and mission. It is with much gratitude that I thank Eva Pasadas of Northeastern University, outgoing Chair, for her support and guidance during another year of significant changes in the region and the country.

Sonya Stern is the Chair of Region I and serves as Director, Sponsored Project Administration at the University of Vermont. She can be reached at Sonya.Stern@uvm.edu.

I am most excited for the return of our in-person regional meeting taking place at the Hotel Dupont in Wilmington Delaware from November 6-9, 2022. For more information or to volunteer in the planning of the Regional Meeting, please contact Sandy Collier at collier@umd.edu. This is an amazing opportunity to meet people throughout the region and see what goes into planning our amazing conferences.

Look out for announcements on the web, Facebook, and in e-blasts as we move forward into the year.

Additionally, I ask members to:

- Join our Facebook page: www.facebook.com/groups/ncuraregionii
- Join the Region II Community on NCURA’s Collaborate: https://collaborate.ncura.edu/communities/community-home?communitykey=8e4f210c-9468-4adc-a1bd-18a950e5be70&tab=groupdetails

Sonya Stern is the Chair of Region I and serves as Director, Sponsored Project Administration at the University of Vermont. She can be reached at Sonya.Stern@uvm.edu.

Maryann Olesky is the Chair of Region II and serves as Director of Proposal Development at the University of Pittsburgh. She can be reached at Maryann.Olesky@pitt.edu.
Dear Flamingo Family,

Happy New Year from Region III! As we move into 2022, we hope that this message find you and your loved ones healthy, happy, and ready to tackle a new year! A new year means new leadership for the region. Our new Secretary, Laney McLean (Boston VA Research Institute) and Treasurer-Elect Jaime Petrasek (Virginia Commonwealth University) take office January 1st. Our new chair-elect, Carpantato (Tanta) Myles (University of Alabama), will take office at the close of our spring meeting.

As we reflect on 2021, we would like to share a few items that our executive committee and standing committees have been working on.

In September 2021, Region III chair Scott Niles convened an ad hoc committee to review the offerings of the Region III Research Administration Mentoring Program (R3RAMP). The committee was charged to review the efficacy, impact, and perceptions of the program. They are working on a review of the program’s vision and content, as well as surveying past members to gather information about their experiences. The committee will be providing a report to the executive committee by the end February, and a summary will be shared on the Region III website. Thank you to our committee members: Georgetta Dennis (Auburn)–chair; Gregory Adams (Broward College), member; Tanya Blackwell (Duke), member; and Leerin Shields (AdventHealth), member.

In November 2021, the Executive Committee met for a fall retreat to provide orientation for incoming officers, review the regions’ administrative procedures and bylaws, and discuss strategic goals for the region. Thank you to Kay Gilstrap (Georgia State) for hosting everyone at her home in Douglasville, GA.

We hope to be able to see many of our members at our 2022 Spring Meeting in Louisville, KY in April. Our chair-elect, Natasha Williams (Emory), her co-chair, Carpantato Myles (University of Alabama), and our planning committee are working with the Galt House Hotel to plan a safe, socially distanced meeting that allows us to meet in person while keeping everyone’s health and safety in mind.

A draft program as well as information about registration and lodging are available on the Region III website (http://ncuraregioniii.com/spring-meeting). As always, you can keep up with Region III by visiting our website at www.ncuraregioniii.com, signing up for the monthly newsletters, joining the Region III Members Collaborate community, and following us on social media (Facebook, Linkedin, and Instagram).

Kathleen Halley-Octa is Region III Secretary and serves as Director, Office of Research & Sponsored Projects in the College of Education and Human Development at Georgia State University. She can be reached at khalley1@gsv.edu.

Happy New Year, Region IV!!! I can’t believe it is now 2022 and we are only a few short months from being together again in Minneapolis! I know that the past couple of years have not been easy, but I also believe we are stronger because of it! There have been countless changes in our lives since March 2020—from not being able to freely seeing family and friends, working remotely from home, not having a regional meeting since 2019 to now being able to safely celebrate with loved ones, what seems like ever-changing work environments (in-person, remote, or hybrid) and looking forward to our first regional, in-person meeting in 3 years! I can hardly believe it has been 3 years since we gathered to collaborate, network, and laugh together!

Our 2022 Spring Meeting will be held at the Marriott City Center in Minneapolis, MN on May 8-11. This is our first chance to meet in person as a region since 2019, and is also the 50th Region IV Spring Meeting! The theme for this year’s meeting is “Sign o’ the Times: Back 2gether and Better Than Ever,” and we can’t wait to celebrate all of the diverse people, institution types, skill sets, and experiences that come together to advance research administration as a profession. We will have lots of opportunities for everyone to get involved in a variety of ways! Keep an eye on your email, as we will be sending out lots of information in the upcoming months—registration, presenting, networking and volunteer opportunities, and so much more! Words are not enough to describe my excitement and anticipation for this year’s meeting! We can’t wait to see everyone in Minneapolis!

Our last virtual Learning Opportunity and Hospitality Hour is tentatively scheduled for Tuesday, February 8th from 4-5pm EST/3-4pm CST (Learning Opportunity) & 5-6pm EST/4-5pm CST (Hospitality Hour). There will be an email sent to members in January for this meeting with all of the details on how to join the meeting and what will be discussed during the Learning Opportunity! You do not have to be a member to attend these sessions, so please feel free to share this with anyone who may be interested.

Looking forward to seeing all of your smiling faces in Minneapolis this May!

Katie Schortgen, CRA, MA, is the Chair of Region IV and serves as the Manager/Director of Grants Accounting at Eastern Michigan University. She can be reached at khoops@emich.edu.
Welcome to 2022—a new year and a new start for our region. We want to take this opportunity to welcome the new members of our Executive Committee: Jerod Kersey (Chair-Elect), Susan Hurley (Treasurer-Elect), Laura Rosales (At-Large Member), Greg Chu and Kathryn Aultman (Chair-Appointed At-Large Members), and Thomas Spencer (National Board Representative). We are also pleased to announce that Adrienne Blalack will be our representative on the National Nominating & Leadership Development Committee. Please join me in congratulating these individuals on their new positions. And we thank those departing our Executive Committee for their service: Katie Plum (Immediate Past Chair), Jeffrey Garza (At-Large Member), Cheryl Anderson (N&LDC), Katherine Kissmann (National Board Representative).

At our fall meeting, we gave two travel awards. Jessica Secratt from Northeastern State University was the winner of the Quinten S. Mathews Regional Travel Award, and Laura Rosales from Baylor College of Medicine was our Experienced Member Award winner. Thank you to the travel awards committee: Amy Ossola-Phillips, The Geneva Foundation; Angelo Chrisomalis, Baylor College of Medicine; Greg Chu, University of Houston; Sarah Cody, Texas Tech University, Sheleza Mohamed, University of Texas-Southwestern; Vanessa Lopez, The University of Texas at Austin.

Jeremy Forsberg from The University of Texas at Arlington was our Distinguished Service Award recipient. Jeremy has been an integral part of NCURA for over 25 years and has served in many leadership roles both at the regional level and national level. Thank you to the DSA awards committee: Beth Cammarn, The University of Texas Medical Branch; Laura Rosales, Baylor College of Medicine; Marianna Gurtovnik, UT-Health Houston; Matt Berry, University of Oklahoma (retired) and past DSA recipient.

In last month’s article, I wrote about the initiatives for our board for 2022. I am proud to say we are moving forward with these with gusto. They include: review and update our regional by-laws, create a membership database, and disseminate information to our membership in a timely and efficient manner. In an effort to help move these along, we are currently seeking members for the following committees: Publications and Communications; Membership and Hospitality; and Mentoring, Leadership and Professional Development. The only requirements are an active NCURA membership and willingness to volunteer your time and effort. Our region cannot be successful without volunteers such as you, so please consider serving as opportunities come up.

We will continue hosting our monthly Lunch and Learn sessions in 2022. Keep an eye out for e-blasts with the subject and sign up for each one. They will be held the second Wednesday of each month at Noon. Wishing everyone a prosperous and healthy 2022.

Tribbie Grimm is Region V Chair and serves as Research Services Administrator at Texas A&M University. She can be reached at tgrimm@tamu.edu.

Here’s to a happy and healthy 2022 to all Region VI membership! I hope that this year is one of renewed passion and commitment to research administration in which we find enormous opportunities for both personal and career growth. As your regional chair for 2022, I want to take a moment to thank our outgoing officers, RAC members, committee chairs and volunteers through your endless dedication and support, provided for an excellent year of “remote” education and growth. With special thanks and gratitude to Lisa Wottrich, 2021 Chair, Manilyn Matau, Treasurer; and Kari Vandergrust, Secretary.

This past year has provided many of us opportunities to join new organizations and perhaps even new NCURA regions. To our new regional members, a huge WELCOME! To that I would like to encourage all Region VI members to give back through volunteering. Organizations like ours depend on its growth and continued successful management through heartfelt and enthusiastic volunteerism. That said, here is a quick list of some volunteer committee opportunities: Regional Advisory Committee (RAC); Nominations & Elections Committee; Awards & Recognition Committee; Education & Professional Development Committee; and finally Membership and Volunteer Committee; Site Selection Committee; Marketing & Communications Committee; and Diversity, Equity & Inclusion Committee. Remember, there are also opportunities to volunteer before and during our regional meeting in the autumn. If you are interested in any of these or just want to volunteer, please reach out to Michiko Pane (michiko@stanford.edu) our Membership & Volunteer Committee Chair.

I would like to congratulate and welcome our 2022 officers including Jennifer Cory, Chair-Elect, Zach Gill, Secretary, Vanessa Azevedo, Treasurer, and Cara Winnewisser, RAC At-Large Member. Looking forward to a great year of collaboration, learning and success!

In the meantime, please keep your eyes and ears open for new learning opportunities throughout the year and of course our in person meeting with Region VII, RM22 on Oct. 29 – Nov. 2 in Tuscon, Arizona! We are planning an amazing conference and look forward to seeing you all there.

Wishing you all continued health and success as we embark on a new year.

Theresa Caban, MPA, CRA, is the Region VI Chair and serves as Director of Clinical Trials at The Lundquist Institute. She can be reached at theresa.caban@lundquist.org.
Happy 2022 fellow Jackalopes!

I am excited to be chairing this wonderful region this year! I plan to continue the work of previous chairs to keep building an inclusive jackalope community within our very large geographic Region. I hope to try to engage more members in volunteer activities and expand what opportunities we do have. All while we continue to navigate in this virtual/hybrid environment. I look forward to connecting!

And speaking of connecting, this year our Regional Meeting (RM2022) will be IN-PERSON! RM2022 will be held in Tucson, AZ (October 30-November 2) and partnering with Region VI. We have started planning for this meeting and hope you will be able to attend. There will be messaging coming out soon for a call for sessions and volunteer opportunities.

I am looking forward to working with a great group of NCURA members that you have elected to serve on the 2022 Leadership Team: Tricia Callahan-Chair Elect, Jason Papka-Treasurer, Lisa Allen-Member-at-Large (Year 2), Joelina Peck- Member-at-Large (Year 1), Noelle Strom-Secretary, Kelly Bergeron-Treasurer-Elect and Vincent Borleske-Regionally-Elected Member of the National Board of Directors.

Being on the Leadership Team is a great way to shape the direction of the Region! Please reach out to me if you are interested in learning more about elected positions.

Finally, please join me in thanking Trisha Southergill for all of her hard work and dedication leading Region VII in 2021! I would also like to thank Ashley Stahle (Past Chair), Chelo Jorge (Past Treasurer), Liz Grinstead (Past Treasurer and all of her work supporting the region), Joalina Peck (Past Secretary) and Sylvia Bradshaw (served as a Member-at-Large in 2021).

Stay connected to the Region: Join our Facebook page and the Region VII community on NCURA Collaborate or visit our regional website: www.ncuraregionvii.org.

Want to volunteer? Contact Volunteer Coordinator Alexa Van Dalsem, alexa.vandalsem@colorado.edu. Alexa will be able to advise on the various opportunities available.

Do you have an idea for a PEDC workshop or want to present a webinar? Contact PEDC chair Kathryn O’Hayre, kathryn.ohayre@colostate.edu.

Natalie Buys is the Chair of Region VII and serves as the Finance and Research Program Director for the Department of Family Medicine at the University of Colorado Anschutz Medical Campus. She can be reached at Natalie.Buys@cuanschutz.edu.

“Just Another Corner Article, Outside the Comfort Zone”

It’s a new year, and I am certain it comes with many hopes and new plans you wrote down somewhere, others which you had lost and somehow convinced yourself of having done, and of course all the new year resolutions you’ve been dragging for the past decade or so.

Many of you may in fact have read the first paragraph and moved on by now, as we usually do with all the non-work material. For the few who are still here, I can tell you that this article took the better of me. For a “regular” person, twenty minutes tops would have been sufficient to complete five paragraphs, but between the daily overworked hours and routine tasks, days were barely enough. We sink and rarely take a step back to make the necessary changes. Just think about it, it’s been two years since COVID-19 first emerged and has reshaped all the HOWs we live by: how we think, how we interact, how we plan…

Trust me, this is not yet another influencer’s words. What the hell do influencers know about our organization, research administration, they got lucky, and now they think they can dictate our life!

“Let’s Collaborate” It has more meaning now than it did before; solidarity brought us out of the world’s pandemic. The medical professionals, front-liners, research backbone, together we fought our way back up, in solidarity. NCURA’s advancing research “together” is key. If I ask you to do something differently in your daily job, what would it be? You will probably shrug the thought aside, or push forward to later in the day, in the week, the month, the year.

My plan for this year, through NCURA, is to work on engaging with a new organization, contact a person from a different institution, ask for an administrative practice they’re struggling with and make it my commitment to find a solution. The solution might be in what my organization does or an administrative practice they’re struggling with and make it my commitment to find a solution. The solution might be in what my organization does or what another NCURA member is doing. At the same time, I will be seeking advice on shortfalls I have.

I urge you to find your NCURA resolution. You’ll be pleasantly surprised by the satisfaction you get from finding answers, making a new collaboration, and helping others.

May the start of this year be a memorable new beginning, where we march into the Post-Covid era, with a common perspective for a better tomorrow.

Makram Halawani is the Chair of Region VIII and serves as Assistant Director, Office of Grants and Contracts at the American University of Beirut in Lebanon. He can be reached at mh149@aub.edu.lb.
Novel lighting system designed for machine vision module of agricultural robots  By Jeff Mulhollem

UNIVERSITY PARK, Pa.—A novel camera system using active lighting devised by Penn State researchers may be a crucial step in developing machine vision systems that allow robotic devices to more clearly “see” the agricultural targets with which they will react.

The system—using “over-current driven” LED lights to produce a powerful flash capable of firing multiple times a second—creates reliable daytime imaging, according to team leader Daeun Choi, assistant professor of agricultural and biological engineering in the College of Agricultural Sciences. The approach overcomes variable lighting and color inconsistencies due to sunlight, she explained, and largely eliminates motion blur that occurs due to vehicle movement and vibrations from ground terrain.

“In the future, this system or one like it will likely be used to guide mechanisms that independently perform labor-intensive tasks such as pruning apple trees, estimating fruit yield, fruit thinning and mushroom picking,” Choi said. “The innovative aspect of this research was that the current drawn by the LED lights was increased by a factor of six times its normal rating, resulting in increased illuminance.”

The research is important, Choi added, because more farmers are interested in adopting technologies in precision agriculture and automation to increase output and efficiency. Driven by an increase in global competition, rising food demand from population growth, and consumers’ expectations of higher quality agricultural products, producers are turning to machine vision systems with remote sensing devices for collecting and analyzing data in agricultural applications.

Research team member Omeed Mirbod, a doctoral student in agricultural and biological engineering, designed a circuit for storing and releasing energy to the LEDs to produce a strobe-like effect and a controller used for synchronizing the strobe with a camera to acquire images. He began exploring the LED strobe concept while working at Carnegie Mellon University, prior to coming to Penn State, where xenon flash lamps were being used for daytime imaging.

“Artificial intelligence does well with images that are really rich with information, so the important thing is capturing high-quality images,” he said. “For agriculture, we need images that are invariant to outdoor lighting conditions. If you capture an image in which a fruit is very saturated with light due to the sun, and then capture another one in shadow where there is little sunlight, the artificial intelligence that you’re training to detect the fruit might struggle to identify it.”

The researchers deployed the system in an apple orchard on three days in the summer of 2020. Images of different canopy structures were taken throughout the day in both sunny and cloudy conditions. Employing the LED flashes resulted in substantial improvement in image brightness and color consistency.

In findings recently published in Computers and Electronics in Agriculture, the researchers reported that images captured by the prototype system were of very high quality. During an 11-hour period, the images showed an average decrease of 85% in standard deviation for the hue-saturation-value channels compared to that of the auto-exposure setting. Additionally, the prototype system was able to fix motion blur in machine vision images with the camera moving at about 4 miles per hour.

The results show that the designed LED flash system can reduce the undesirable effects of lighting variability and motion blur in images stemming from outdoor field conditions, Mirbod noted. The research was needed, he added, because most previous studies related to machine vision and robotics were conducted under indoor conditions.

Xenon flash lamps had been used for daytime imaging and LEDs were used for nighttime imaging in previous studies, but Mirbod thought this research was necessary because no one had made an evaluation about the performance of overcurrent-driven LED lights for daytime imaging applications.

“When we apply the same technology to agriculture fields, we encounter lots of difficulties,” he said. “The most challenging thing is weather and varying sunlight conditions. And when we use a regular camera setup, with a lighting system designed for indoor use, we end up getting really terrible images that are difficult to work with.”

The active LED lighting, machine vision concept designed by Penn State researchers is aimed at guiding ag robots that can work in the field 24 hours a day, seven days a week, Mirbod said.

“So, it won’t matter what time they are working or whether there is much sunlight,” said Mirbod. “Because, at the end of the day, we want to have fully automated systems that can work in the field anytime.”

Roderick Thomas, associate teaching professor of agricultural and biological engineering, and Long He, assistant professor of agricultural and biological engineering, contributed to this research.

The State Horticultural Association of Pennsylvania and the U.S. Department of Agriculture’s National Institute of Food and Agriculture supported this study.
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MORE INFO: ASK.KR@KUALI.CO
LIVE VIRTUAL WORKSHOPS
• Level I: Fundamentals of Sponsored Project Administration Workshop
  February 7-10, 2022
  1:00-5:00 pm ET

• Departmental Research Administration Workshop
  February 15-18, 2022
  1:00-5:00 pm ET

• Level II: Sponsored Projects Administration Workshop
  April 25-28, 2022
  1:00-5:00 pm ET

IN-PERSON TRAVELING WORKSHOPS
• Level I: Fundamentals of Sponsored Project Administration Workshop
  May 16-18, 2022
  Las Vegas, NV

• Financial Research Administration Workshop
  May 16-18, 2022
  Las Vegas, NV

ON-DEMAND WEBINARS
• Developing Compelling Budget Justifications
• Guidance on the Preparation of NIH RPPRs with COVID-19 Impacts and Other Support
• In-N-Out: Here’s What PI Transfers Are All About
• Participant Support Costs: An Overview of Dos and Don’ts
• Work Smarter, Not Harder: The Tools, Methods and Technology to Increase Productivity

ONLINE TUTORIALS – 10 week programs
• A Primer on Clinical Trials
• A Primer on Federal Contracting
• A Primer on Intellectual Property in Research Agreements
• A Primer on Subawards

NATIONAL CONFERENCES
• Financial Research Administration Conference
  March 14-15, 2022
  New Orleans, LA

• Pre-Award Research Administration Conference
  March 17-18, 2022
  New Orleans, LA

• Annual Meeting
  August 7-10, 2022
  Washington, DC

REGIONAL MEETINGS
• Region I (New England)
  May 1-4, 2022
  Newport, RI

• Region II (Mid-Atlantic)
  Nov 6-9, 2022
  Wilmington, DE

• Region III (Southeastern)
  May 1-4, 2022
  Louisville, KY

• Region IV (Mid-America)
  Minneapolis, MN
  May 8-11, 2022

• Region VI (Western)/Region VII (Rocky Mountain)
  Oct 30-Nov 2, 2022
  Tucson, AZ

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