Catalyst Quarterly

BY THE SOCIETY OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATORS INTERNATIONAL

Offering the latest updates, member experiences and achievements, and expert perspectives in research management and administration.

JUNE 2025

VOLUME 01 | ISSUE 01

IN THIS ISSUE.

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VOLUME 01 | ISSUE 01 | JUNE 2025

Introduction

The Society of Research Administrators International proudly presents the *Catalyst Quarterly*—a special magazine edition of our newsletter, *Catalyst*. This publication features timely new content alongside standout pieces from the past quarter, offering the latest updates, member experiences and achievements, and expert perspectives in research management and administration.

With each issue, as we aim to uphold SRAI's mission to promote international best practices and support the growth of the research enterprise, the *Catalyst Quarterly* encourages our global community to collaborate, innovate, and continue advancing the quality of the academic and research environment worldwide.

SRAI | SOCIETY OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATORS INTERNATIONAL

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QUARTER 1&2 HIGHLIGHTS: *PUTTING PRACTICE INTO MOTION*

What does it take to adapt, lead, and support research in a constantly changing environment? From budget principles and mentorship to cross-generational collaboration, this collection features hands-on, field-tested wisdom from professionals moving the work forward, one project at a time.

SRAI NEWS & RESOURCES

Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

I am so pleased to share our first edition of the *Catalyst Quarterly.* In this edition, we present new articles and revisit some of the highlights of the first quarter of 2025. None of this could have been accomplished without our dedicated Feature Editors, who promote the magazine and encourage colleagues to write the articles, review the submissions and make recommendations for publication. I also want to take this opportunity to thank everyone in our community who has contributed to the Catalyst—your contributions to the magazine help inspire, encourage, guide, and support all our readers.

The research administration journey involves many twists and turns. We begin each effort with grant development and strategy trying to predict, analyze and document what will become a successful proposal. We celebrate our successes with awards that we then manage and oversee in our roles as stewards of the funds received. We ensure compliance so that our researchers may continue to do their best work without any barriers. We develop and enhance effective operations and workflows in order to do all of this as efficiently as possible. All the while, we grow— individually and as a community— creating career opportunities for those just entering our field, and leadership roles for senior professionals. The Catalyst is your magazine and venue for sharing knowledge and learning from each other in all of these areas. If the magazine inspires you, we would love to publish you!

The work of a research administrator is never done—and the same can be said about our community. It's your shared stories, strategies, and successes that keep us moving forward. Let this issue serve as a catalyst for bold ideas, new standards, and continued growth in research administration.

Farida Lada

Meet the Editorial Team

Farida Lada, PhD, MBA

Editor

Chief Campus Compliance Officer, University of California San Francisco.

Farida previously served as Associate University Provost for Research Administration and Compliance at the City University of New York, and was Founding Academic Director of the MS Program in Research Administration and Compliance at the CUNY School of Professional Studies. Prior roles include Director of Research Compliance at Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar.

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When not working or spending time with friends and family, Aynoka stays busy with home improvement projects, unwinds with yoga, and tries training her cat to jump through hoops.

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Carly is located in the School of Medicine (SOM) Dean's Office, where she currently oversees the Core Services business operations, the lead data analyst for the SOM Office of Research, and manages the Louisiana Clinical and Translational Sciences Center (U54) program.

Career Growth & Leadership

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Olumide sources research funding opportunities, reviews research funding applications and obtains internal approvals. He serves as a mentor for SRAI Author Fellowship and Odyssey Programs and is passionate about generating new knowledge in research management.

Community & Member Engagement

Kimberly S. McKoy, Ed.D., CRA

Feature Editor

Associate Director of Contracts and Grants, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.

Kimberly has over 23 years of higher education experience. She served on the *Journal of Research Administration* Board since 2015. She is also a Co-Chair for the Sponsors and Agencies Track.

Sheleza Mohamed, MBA, MHA, FACHE, CRA, CFRA, CPRA

Feature Editor

Sheleza is a Federal Grants SME with over 20 years of experience. Sheleza contributes to the field of research administration as a frequent national and international speaker and trainer. She is also an avid volunteer, leader, and writer for SRAI and NCURA.

Grant Development & Strategy

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Feature Editor

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Jose brings extensive experience in higher education, research administration, and research development and has been a long time member of SRAI, currently serving as SRAI Distinguished Faculty.

Kimberly Read, PhD

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With thirty years of experience in business, research administration, and human resources, Dr. Read has been a member of SRAI since 2010, and currently serves as SRAI Distinguished Faculty.

Grant Management & Financial Oversight

Tamara Ginter, CFRA

Feature Editor

Director of Finance, College of STEM, Eastern Washington University.

Tamara previously worked for 17 years at the college level at Texas Tech University. In her current role, she oversees all college finances, including post award activities for grants and sponsored projects. She received her CFRA in 2024.

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Interim Director, NCSU College of Sciences Research Office.

Betty has over 20 years in the life-cycle management of the Research Administration profession. She has worked at UNC CH, Duke, and George Washington Universities.

Operations & Workflow Management

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Feature Editor

Chief Administrative Officer, Neurobiology and Computational Medicine, David Geffen School of Medicine at UCLA

With 35 years of experience in research administration, Mark has served on the SRAI Catalyst Committee for the past five years. He is President Elect for the SRAI Western Section and also serves as SRAI Distinguished Faculty.

Anita Sharma

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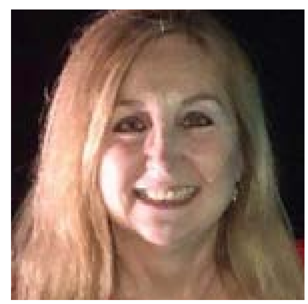
Director, Research Services, Office of the VP Research, Thompson Rivers University, Kamloops, BC, Canada.

Anita manages institutional programs, leading strategic planning and program development, researcher development, grant facilitation, and internal awards administration. Also an SRAI Future of the Field honoree, she is passionate about the progressive growth of the institutional research profile.

Regulatory & Compliance Oversight



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Director of Research Compliance at Texas A&M University–San Antonio

In her role, Rani manages IACUC, IBC, IRB, export controls, research security, RCR, research integrity and more. She holds doctoral degrees in both Education and Ecology, and has been published in SRAI's *Journal of Research Administration* and *Catalyst.* She enjoys writing about best practices, challenges, and trends in the field.

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In her role, Anita oversees NIH documents and regulatory activities. She holds a B.S. in Graphic Design from Farmingdale State College, SUNY, and a M.S. from Bridgeport University. Passionate about fostering community engagement, she regularly offers guidance to colleagues and aspiring professionals.

The Latest from the Catalyst

GRANT MANAGEMENT & FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT

Empowering Research Teams: A Guide to Effective Post-Award Management Training for Principal Investigators and Research Staff

By Laura Sheehan

A strategic approach to post-award management training: Learn how tailored guidance on budget management, compliance, and reporting can enhance project success while avoiding common pitfalls that jeopardize funding and research continuity. (Based on a concurrent session led by the author at an SRAI Annual Meeting, November 2022.)

The excitement of securing funding can often shift to overwhelming feelings once a Principal Investigator (PI) dives headfirst into the complexities of budget management, reporting requirements, and compliance. Yet, all too often, training in post-award management is geared only towards fund managers and research administrators, leaving PIs and their research staff feeling underprepared. While fund managers and research administrators require in-depth knowledge of financial regulations and reporting procedures, PIs and research staff need a different skillset.

This article outlines a strategy for developing effective post-award management training that empowers research teams, fosters compliance, and ultimately contributes to the success of research endeavors. By providing the right tools and knowledge, we can create a smoother and more efficient research process.

Building a Foundation for Success

Effective post-award training for research teams should include several key components:

- Understanding the WHY: Training should clearly explain the purpose and importance of various post-award documents, such as financial ledgers, purchase request forms, and reporting templates. By understanding why these tools are necessary, research teams are more likely to use them correctly and consistently.
- Skill Building: Post-award management involves a range of practical skills, including basic accounting principles, budget reconciliation, and interpreting financial reports. Training should provide hands-on skill-building exercises to equip research teams with these essential abilities.
- Create Documents to Provide Reference Materials: As a research administrator, you should create comprehensive written guidelines, "how-to" documents, and fillable forms to assist your PI's. These serve as invaluable resources that research teams can refer to whenever questions arise. These materials should be clear, concise, easily accessible, user-friendly and designed to capture or convey all necessary information.
- Navigating Resources: Provide contact information for key persons and departments involved in post-award management.

The "Carrot and Stick" Approach

To motivate PIs and research staff to actively engage in post-award management, it's helpful to emphasize both the benefits and the consequences:

- **The "Carrot":**
    - Research runs more smoothly when post-award processes are well-managed.
    - Effective financial management ensures that funds are spent fully and appropriately, increasing the likelihood of securing future funding.
    - Training empowers research teams with greater control over their projects.
- **The "Stick":**
    - Failure to comply with institutional, sponsor, or governmental policies can lead to serious consequences.
    - Poor post-award management can result in the loss of funding.

- The dreaded “A-word” (audit) highlights the importance of accurate record-keeping and compliance.

Tailoring Training to Your Institution

The format and content of post-award training should be tailored to the specific needs and context of your institution. Key considerations include:

- Integration: Should the training be a completely new program, or can it be integrated into existing infrastructure?
- Mandatory vs. Optional: Should the training be mandatory for all research personnel, or required only for new or junior staff? Should it be a one-time training or an annual requirement?
- Accessibility: How will training materials be made available to research teams (e.g., website, shared folder, learning management system)?
- Audience Differentiation: Should there be different training programs for PIs versus that for other research staff?
- Collaboration: Can the training be coordinated with similar departments or divisions to maximize resources and ensure consistency?
- Communication: How will personnel be kept updated on changes to policies, revised guidance, and important reminders?

Content is King

The content of post-award training should be relevant, practical, and address the specific challenges faced by research teams. Key areas to cover include:

- Roles and Responsibilities: Clearly define the roles and responsibilities of all key players in the post-award process, providing contact information and a concise summary of each person’s or department’s function.
- The Life of an Award: Provide a high-level overview of the entire award lifecycle, from the notice of award to closeout, emphasizing where the research team fits into the overall process.
- Expectations: Clearly outline the responsibilities of PIs and their teams, including obtaining necessary approvals, conducting research ethically, and managing project funds responsibly.
- Understanding Documents: Familiarize research teams with common post-award documents, such as award notices, financial ledgers, and purchase request forms, providing step-by-step guidance on how to interpret and use them.
- Finance Team Collaboration: Emphasize the importance of regular communication and meetings with fund managers to ensure accurate financial management.
- Common Scenarios: Address common post-award scenarios, such as delayed funding, budget reallocations, subaward management, and award extensions, providing clear guidance on how to handle these situations.
- Resources: Provide a comprehensive list of resources and contacts for further information and assistance.

Creating Effective Training Materials

The design and delivery of training materials are crucial for maximizing their impact. Key principles include:

- Simplicity: Keep the materials clear, concise, and easy to understand. Avoid jargon and technical language whenever possible.
- Relevance: Tailor the materials to the specific needs and challenges of the target audience.
- Accessibility: Ensure that materials are easily accessible

Three types of materials are particularly effective:

- Detailed Guidelines: Comprehensive documents that provide in-depth information on post-award policies and procedures.
- Decision Tree Checklists: Visual aids that guide users through more complicated post-award scenarios, where the correct steps may vary based on the answer to specific questions.
- Fillable Forms: Standardized forms that simplify common post-award transactions and data collection.

Tips for Success

- Don't Reinvent the Wheel: Leverage existing resources and materials whenever possible.
- Know Your Audience: Tailor the training to the specific needs and experience levels of your target audience.
- Ensure Compliance: Align all materials with institutional and sponsor policies.
- Beta Test: Pilot test materials with a small group of users to identify any areas for improvement.
- Regularly Update: Review and update materials regularly to ensure they remain current and accurate.

Investing in effective post-award management training for PIs and research staff is an investment in the success of research itself. By providing the right tools, knowledge, and support, we can empower research teams to navigate the complexities of post-award management with confidence, ensuring compliance, maximizing resources, and ultimately advancing scientific discovery.

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COMMUNITY & MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Agility in Action: A Career Retrospective from R1 Institutions to the Heart of Health Equity

By Moniqua Holton, PMP, LSSYB

Agility, purpose, and impact. Moniqua Holton, PMP, LSSYB, reflects on her research administration career—from R1 institutions to advancing health equity at the American Heart Association—through the lens of project management.

As a certified Project Management Professional (PMP), the word that comes to mind when I reflect on the phases of my career journey is Agility. From R1 institutions to national public health initiatives, my path in research administration has mirrored the phrases project lifecycle—from initiation to closure—each phase sharpening my tools as a strategic, people-centered leader.

When I joined the American Heart Association (AHA) four years ago as the inaugural National Senior Government Grants Administrator, I could not have imagined how far the journey would stretch—or how full-circle it would feel. I served on the task force that led to the organization's first centralized grant office—the Office of Funded Programs—and managed its largest and most complex federal awards, including a $32 million national hypertension control initiative launched during the global pandemic. With 100 team members, the initiative spanned the U.S. and territories, including the Federated States of

Micronesia and the Republic of Palau. I even spoke before more than 2,000 staff members on AHA's Courageous Conversations platform, advocating health equity and research access.

Initiation Phase – From Curiosity to Commitment

Twelve years ago, my affinity for finance became the bridge to a rewarding career in research administration. At the University of Miami's Finance & Treasury division, I led supply chain management and reconciliations across sixteen clinical units. While I thrived in the fast-paced, patient-centered environment, I longed for a more mission-driven challenge. When the opportunity to join the Office of Research Administration (ORA) arose, I feared the pace would slow. (Spoiler: it didn't.) That transition marked the initiation of a journey where strategy, compliance, and purpose intersected.

Planning Phase – Designing a Research Foundation

Over nearly five years in UM's central ORA, I developed a bird's-eye view of the research enterprise. I led financial mapping for all sponsored research accounts, monitored policy shifts, and ensured audit readiness, and supported university-wide Enterprise Resource Planning and financial system implementations. I collaborated cross-functionally to align teams and processes. Each account became a blueprint; every system an opportunity to grow.

Execution & Monitoring – Scaling Strategy at Emory

In 2019, I took a leap of faith and relocated to Atlanta to join Emory University, supporting the Winship Cancer Institute—Georgia's only NIH NCI-designated center. I was assigned an NIH P50 on my first day and quickly embraced Agile thinking: scoping deliverables, identifying risks, and aligning stakeholders. Within a year, I submitted two P50s, became a training grant SME, and co-led institutional knowledge-sharing—all while navigating the decentralized infrastructure.

Closure Phase – The Power of Pause

As I close this iteration of my career, I've come to realize that closure isn't an end—it's a transformation. The systems I've built, the strategies I've led, and the public health goals I've aligned with federal funding have deepened my resolve to give back. Through public speaking, mentorship, and consulting, I remain dedicated to advancing research and health equity.

If your career were a project, what phase would you be in—and how will you iterate forward?

Let's connect, collaborate, and champion the next generation of research project leaders—together.

With Heart,

Moniqua

AUTHORED BY:

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GRANT DEVELOPMENT & STRATEGY

Canada's Role in Advancing Research Collaboration with the Caribbean and Latin America: The Centrality of Research Administration in Knowledge Co-Production and Mobilization

By Mickel A. Allen

Canada's research collaboration with the Caribbean and Latin America are vital. This article underscores how their research administrators facilitate the transnational collaborations, with attention on their roles. By examining initiatives in artificial intelligence (AI) and development-oriented research, this analysis highlights successful research administration infrastructure and knowledge co-production.

The imperative for collaborative research and innovation between the Global North and South is more pressing than ever, given the complexity of global crises spanning climate change, health equity, and technological transformation. Canada's longstanding commitment to inclusive research frameworks and its well-developed institutional support systems uniquely position it to deepen ties with Latin America and the Caribbean. These partnerships create new contexts for research, particularly in AI, public health, and environmental resilience. However, their success is contingent upon the often-overlooked expertise and coordination provided by research administrators.

Research administrators serve as critical intermediaries connecting researchers, institutions, and funding bodies. Their responsibilities extend beyond logistical support to encompass the strategic alignment of research agendas, capacity-building efforts, funding acquisition, and the navigation of ethical standards. As Phipps (2012) and subsequent scholarship (Phipps et al., 2025) have emphasized, administrators play a pivotal role in knowledge mobilization—translating research into policy-relevant, socially impactful outcomes. Within Canadian-led AI collaborations, such as those spearheaded by Jude Kong and colleagues, administrators have been instrumental in shaping projects responsive to local development needs, particularly in agriculture, climate adaptation, and public health sectors. These efforts ensure adherence to ethical frameworks and promote equitable resource allocation.

Crucially, knowledge mobilization entails more than dissemination; it involves the co-creation of knowledge through reciprocal engagement with local communities. Research administrators are central to this process, supporting inclusive research design, adapting methodologies to culturally and regionally specific contexts, and integrating diverse knowledge systems. Tools and training, offered by organizations such as Research Impact Canada, further enhance administrators' capacity to facilitate meaningful co-production processes and sustained global-local linkages.

Emerging technologies, including AI, coupled with strong community engagement practices, enable the development of solutions that are both contextually grounded and internationally relevant. As emphasized by Huang, Harvey, and Vincent (2024), large-scale sustainability initiatives demand strategic coordination across institutions and regions and are roles research administrators are well equipped to perform. By aligning institutional goals through networks such as the Canadian Association of Research Administrators (CARA-ACAAR), administrators facilitate cross-border collaborations that not only produce knowledge but actively mobilize it to inform policy and practice.

Despite their strategic importance, research administrators face systemic challenges, including historical power imbalances, funding asymmetries, and institutional disparities. Political instability and economic constraints across the Caribbean and Latin America also present obstacles to long-term collaboration. Nevertheless, these barriers offer opportunities to reimagine equitable partnership models. Canada's engagement with international funding platforms, such as Horizon Europe, enables its institutions to connect Latin American and Caribbean researchers with broader global initiatives.

With diminishing U.S. investment in development research, Canada is poised to assume a leadership role. Research administrators are crucial to shaping new funding architectures, supporting collaborative grant development, and sustaining long-term partnerships that promote mutual growth. As global development priorities continue to evolve, the expertise and infrastructure offered by Canada's research administrators will remain essential in supporting inclusive, ethical, and impactful research collaborations.

"Despite their strategic importance, research administrators face systemic challenges, including historical power imbalances, funding asymmetries, and institutional disparities."

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CAREER GROWTH & LEADERSHIP

Research Administration is a Team Sport

By Kimberly Pratt

As a mom navigating the world of pee-wee athletics, I've discovered that research administration is a lot like a team sport. From collaboration and communication to strategy and resilience, the lessons from the field apply to our work in unexpected ways.

I am decidedly not a sports person but somehow ended up with a sports-loving kid. Over the many seasons my son has played soccer, basketball, and football, I have watched (more than?) my fair share of team practices and games. With another spring sports season in full swing, I recently reflected that research administration is also a team sport, for example:

1. Collaboration: Research Administration takes teamwork. Just like in sports, success in the research enterprise requires researchers, administrators, funding agencies, and other staff to work together with each person contributing their talents and experience towards a common goal. Research administrators prioritize the accomplishments of the team and understand that no individual can do it all.

2. Roles and Responsibilities: In team sports, each player holds a unique position that contributes to the team's accomplishments. Similarly, in research administration, different individuals play their own part, such as grant writing, compliance monitoring, or financial management, all of which are crucial for the successful submission and the smooth operation of research projects.

3. Communication: Effective communication is key in both team sports and research administration. Clear and timely communication between and among teams reduces misunderstandings, enhances efficiency, and ensures that everyone is on the same page and that no one drops the ball along the way!

4. Strategy and Planning: Just as sports teams develop strategies and game plans before the big game, research administration involves strategic planning to look ahead at the funding landscape, make plans, manage resources, and achieve research objectives. Effective strategy and planning ensure that research projects are well-coordinated and aligned with institutional goals, maximizing their impact. Like head coaches, research administration leaders lay this foundation to lead their teams to success.

5. Adaptability and Resilience: In sports, teams must adapt to changing circumstances, such as injuries or shifts in the opponent's strategy. Similarly, research administrators must be flexible and responsive to changes in funding opportunities, regulatory requirements, and project timelines. No two days are the same in this job, but we just keep going!

6. Support and Encouragement: Team sports thrive on mutual support and encouragement. In research administration, fostering a supportive environment helps maintain morale and motivates team members to overcome challenges and achieve their goals. Like relationships between players, the relationships I have created with the people in my network, on my team, at the organizations I've worked in, as part of multi-institution teams, and as part of the larger SRAI community inspires me to keep going.

7. Practice: Talented athletes continuously practice their sport and work to improve their performance. In a world of new funding opportunities and ever-changing regulations, research administrators dedicate time to their professional development. Instead of hundreds of free throws, we read blogs and articles, watch webinars, attend conferences, and constantly learn from one another to keep our skills sharp.

8. Versatility: Like noted multi-sport athletes, such as Michael Jordan or Bo Jackson, there are always opportunities for research administrators to parlay their experience in one domain into a new arena. Pre-award experts might put their experience and perspective to work on the post-award side, or central office staff might move into a department role. As new focus areas emerge, such as export control or research security, opportunities appear for administrators to demonstrate their talents in additional arenas.

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OPERATIONS & WORKFLOW MANAGEMENT

Understanding Research Administration in Uganda

By Ms Boniconsilli Tusiime

Research administration is a global field. While it varies by nation, people are people and research administration is research administration. Have you considered how things may be the same and yet different in a country like Uganda?

Uganda has regulatory bodies such as the Uganda National Council for Science and Technology (UNCST), which coordinates and regulates research activities. Additionally, organizations like the National Drug Authority (NDA) and the National HIV/AIDS Research Committee (NARC) provide specific approvals for clinical or HIV-related research. Institutional research ethics committees and review boards in universities and hospitals also review and approve research protocols.

Despite government support, the primary source of research funding in Uganda comes from external funders such as the U.S. NIH, the U.K. Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office (FCDO), the Wellcome Trust, the European Union, the World Bank, and private philanthropies like the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. Government funding for research and experimental development remains below 0.5% of the national budget.

At Makerere University, research administration operates through a hybrid of centralized and decentralized systems. The Grants Administration & Management Support Unit (GAMSU) serves as the central office, overseeing grants management, audits, and policy issues. Each school within the university also maintains its own research support office, which manages both pre-award and post-award grant activities.

> A major challenge in Uganda is the lack of streamlined systems and tools. Research administrators in Uganda still rely on manual processes, such as compiling burn rate reports using spreadsheets-a task that would be automated in most U.S. systems

My typical day as a research administrator starts by scanning emails for donor deadlines and any inquiries from Principal Investigators (PIs). I review the Grants Office tracker to check on upcoming deadlines and reports. I meet with researchers and faculty members to interpret funding opportunity announcements and assist with proposal development. I also monitor the financial burn rates of nearing grant expirations, ensuring there are no underspends. In addition, I support new project setups, search for new funding opportunities, and conduct training sessions on research management best practices. I collaborate with colleagues to address challenges and share updates on any critical issues that require oversight from the central research support unit. My day usually ends with updating the Grants Management tracking tool and setting reminders for upcoming meetings with PIs. I imagine not so different from your day!

At Makerere University, research administration follows the same playbook to that of a U.S. institution, even if the tools and staffing levels differ. A hybrid structure is in place: the central Grants Administration & Management Support Unit (GAMSU) sets policy and signs contracts, while faculty-level grant officers handle day-to-day proposal support—similar to central offices and college units at U.S. campuses. The key differences lie in funding sources and technology. While U.S. universities depend on federal agencies such as NIH and NSF, Makerere relies heavily on external donors, U.S. NIH, the Welcome Trust, the EU, and the World Bank, due to limited domestic government funding. In terms of processes, the checkpoints are similar: eligibility reviews, budget reviews, ethics clearance, contract negotiation, post-award reporting—but the workflow in Uganda is still largely manual using tools such as Google Sheets, Excel, and shared drives, supported by basic in-house grants databases. In contrast, U.S. institutions usually use mature electronic research administration suites such as InfoEd, Cayuse, and Kuali.

Staff roles differ. At Makerere, research administrators are generalists, supporting both pre- and post-award responsibilities, while in the U.S., teams often specialized (pre-award, post-award, compliance, etc.). This difference is less about standards and more about the depth of available technology and staffing.

A major challenge in Uganda is the lack of streamlined systems and tools. Research administrators in Uganda still rely on manual processes, such as compiling burn rate reports using spreadsheets—a task that would be automated in most U.S. systems.

Furthermore, Uganda relies on multiple donors, each with their own templates, indirect cost policies, ethics requirements, and audit standards. Smaller teams often struggle to keep up with the demands of mastering these diverse systems, leading to capacity strain, delays, and inconsistent information.

Additional challenges include limited local funding and gaps in grant writing and administration capacity. The ethics approval process can take up to 6–8 months, significantly slowing down research timelines. Infrastructure and technology issues—such as power outages—can disrupt data uploads, virtual meetings, and data analysis.

Despite these challenges, Uganda is a wonderful country with a growing field of research administration. Tukusanyukidde!

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REGULATORY & COMPLIANCE OVERSIGHT

Federal Award Regulations: How Did We Get Here?

By Shipra Mittal

Have you ever wondered how federal regulations on awards came about? From the post-war era to the present, it's important to understand the roots of the U.S. regulation structure, the ways it has changed throughout the years, and how it defines the way we work today.

As a fellow research administrator, you would agree that there are numerous evolving regulations governing federal awards. These regulations are designed to reduce abuse, waste, and fraud. We often talk about what these regulations are but there is limited insight available on how these regulations came about. This article explores the history of federal regulations and key events that shaped them, providing some context for our work.

The roots of federal financial oversight can be traced back to the post-World War I era. In 1921, U.S. Congress under the Budget and Accounting Act, created the Bureau of the Budget (BOB) for a more structured and centralized approach to budgeting under the direction of the President. BOB was later renamed the Office of Management and Budget (Office of Management and Budget, 2013). Under the same act, the General Accounting Office (GAO) was created for better control over expenditures (Budget and Accounting Act, 1921).

GAO was created so that the auditing and accounting functions were independent of the executive branch to avoid conflicts of interest that could compromise the integrity of the audits. GAO was later renamed Government Accountability Office as we know it today. GAO issued first Internal Control Standards in 1983 known as the "Green book" (U.S. Government Accountability Office, 2001) that provided first uniform guidance for internal controls across federal agencies.

The1970s and 1980s saw accounting scandals such as Equity Funding and National Student Marketing (Cole, 1973). These scandals prompted the Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission (COSO) to release their internal control framework in 1992. The framework was later updated in 2013. COSO is a private-sector initiative sponsored by five leading professional organizations in accounting (Committee of Sponsoring Organizations of the Treadway Commission, 2013). The COSO framework provided principles for designing, implementing, and conducting internal controls that allow organizations to achieve their operations, reporting, and compliance objectives.

In the early 2000s came the big corporate scandals, where top executives cooked the books to create an illusion of profit. For Enron, an American energy company, this resulted in billions of dollars lost, and losses in jobs and retirement savings for many Enron employees in 2001. In 2002, fraudulent practices at WorldCom led to the largest bankruptcy in history with an estimated $180 billion in losses (Doxey C. H., 2019).

In response to these corporate scandals, Congress passed the Sarbanes–Oxley Act (SOX) in 2002 to improve accountability and reliability of corporate disclosures. To protect investors, SOX established eleven titles outlining requirements for companies to enhance the accuracy and reliability of their financial disclosures. The titles included establishing the Public Company Accounting Oversight Board (PCAOB) to oversee audit firms, Auditor Independence to avoid conflicts of interest, Corporate Responsibility to prevent improper influence on audits, Enhanced Financial Disclosures, Corporate and Criminal Fraud Accountability establishing criminal penalties for altering documents and protecting employees, White-Collar Crime Penalty Enhancements, and

Corporate Fraud Accountability, among others ("Sarbanes-Oxley Act of 2002," 2002). To satisfy SOX regulations, companies adopted the COSO framework. This framework can be applied to any entity of any scale including for-profit and non-for-profit organizations (Commission, 2013).

The Greenbook and the COSO framework became the standard for auditing federal awards. Uniform Guidance also adopted this framework and required recipients to follow guidance in "Greenbook" or the COSO framework ((OMB), 2013) for consistency and to improve recipients' management of federal awards.

In conclusion, the history of federal regulations is almost a century old with significant legislative acts to reduce fraud, abuse, and waste of federal funds. As federal award oversight intensifies, compliance with federal regulations has become increasingly important. Understanding the historical development of these regulations provides valuable context for the multifaceted work in research administration.

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COMMUNITY & MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

The Journey to a Culture of Research Success

By Stacy Pritt, DVM, MS, MBA, CPIA, CHRC, EXCS, ECoP(EAR), DACAW

Many research administrators focus on maintaining a culture of compliance. But what if there is another way—one that centers on the same goal as researchers: their success?

Like many journeys, this one started in an airplane. Years ago, I was on a small plane and witnessed an excruciatingly tense and uncomfortable exchange between a flight attendant who demanded that a passenger "comply" and put their mobile phone in airplane mode, which the passenger announced they would not do.

As a professional with years of experience leading research compliance efforts at multiple institutions, one would assume that I would advocate for promoting a strict culture of compliance. But I always come back to that moment on the plane. For me, instead of promoting a culture of compliance, I aim to build and support cultures of research success.

I am not the first person to say this—and I won't be the last—but compliance represents the floor, the minimally accepted level of adherence to requirements. While compliance is essential within the research environment, its focus is not necessarily on ensuring a successful outcome for any specific researcher's endeavor. Rather, it's about mitigating institutional risk and liability while helping researchers meet the necessary requirements to conduct their work. Admittedly, that is perhaps an overly simplistic viewpoint, but it is probably the viewpoint held by many of the researchers that we serve and work with.

When we talk about the role of research administrator, the concept of service is often mentioned. Researchers are our internal customers. Years ago, as I began the leading efforts to reduce administrative burden within Institutional Animal Care and Use Committees (IACUCs), I asked myself a critical question: If researchers are our customers, shouldn't we focus on what makes them successful? (Pritt, 2015; Pritt, 2018; Pritt et al., 2016; Pritt & McNulty, 2016).

That brought me to the culture of research success. This type of goes beyond individual research compliance units (IACUCs, institutional review boards (IRBs), etc.); it breaks down silos and unites institutional offices around a shared goal: supporting researchers. Relationships can be made with a unifying theme of success, and everyone can share in that success when it is achieved. Processes, policies, training, and a whole host of other activities can be re-imagined to support successful research outcomes.

While leading an IACUC office, I revised our researcher onboarding training to focus not just on compliance, but on researcher success (Cavanaugh & Pritt, 2019). That includes understanding how to effectively communicate with compliance offices, navigate institutional resources, and build relationships across departments—especially vital for new investigators. Not every institution or research administrator gets behind a culture of research success, for a variety of reasons. I've been fortunate to work within a system of universities and state agencies that rallies around a culture of research success. I have witnessed firsthand how that focus inspires and uplifts research administrators.

What excites me most is that this journey is ongoing. Every new project, opportunity, and researcher brings new momentum. That's deeply motivating. And I still think back to that flight. If the flight attendant and the passenger had been aligned on the shared goal—getting to the destination safely—rather than caught in a power struggle over rules, how much more pleasant that flight would have been.

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CAREER GROWTH & LEADERSHIP

The Evolving Landscape of Academic Research Administration: Building Resilience and Thriving in Times of Change

By Holly R. Zink, PhD

Academic research administration is evolving rapidly—funding shifts, regulatory changes, and institutional transformations are constant. But with change comes opportunity. Now is the time to embrace informed optimism, lead with resilience, and drive progress. Research administrators don't just support discovery—we make it possible. The future is unfolding—let's shape it together.

Change in research administration is not a distant threat—it's a constant reality. Funding shifts, regulatory updates, and institutional changes are part of our professional landscape every year. But with every shift, we have a choice: resist and fall behind, or step forward, adapt, and lead.

The most compelling research administrators don't just react to change—they anticipate it, embrace it, and drive progress. Ours is not a passive role. We are the backbone of research operations, ensuring that groundbreaking research discoveries continue unimpeded. Success in this advancing field demands more than just adaptation — it requires resilience, strategic action, and an unwavering commitment to the research we support. Resilience is not just a quality—it is a superpower that enables us to thrive in the face of constant change.

Leading Through Change, Not Just Managing It

Regulatory shifts, new sponsor mandates, and institutional restructuring are disruptive, but resistance is not the answer—preparedness is. Change does not mean chaos if we approach it with informed strategy and proactive leadership.

Staying ahead requires vigilance: tracking updates from federal agencies, understanding daily shifting compliance requirements, and engaging with institutional leadership. Continuous learning, through professional development, mentorship, and peer networks, equips us with the expertise to confidently navigate these complexities. Strong communication with principal investigators, department heads, and federal program officers ensures we move forward together rather than scrambling individually to adjust. No research administrator is navigating these changes alone.

The Role of Research Administrators: The Quiet Leaders of Research Success

Research administrators are not supporting players in scientific discovery — we are strategic partners in making it possible. We translate complex regulations into action, ensuring that research stays compliant, funded, and operational. We bridge the gap between institutional policies and real-world research, advocating for effective policies that balance compliance with efficiency. And, most importantly, we are problem-solvers, ensuring that new challenges never become persistent roadblocks.

> “The future of research administration will be shaped by those willing to lead through change, not just endure it. That time is now.”

Proactivity is our most potent tool. By conducting impact assessments, scenario planning, and technology-driven process improvements, we don’t just react to change—we stay ahead of it. But we don’t do this alone. Collaboration is equally crucial because working together across departments, compliance teams, and finance offices ensures smoother transitions and more resilient research operations. Together, we are stronger and more capable of navigating the challenges of our evolving landscape.

Hope is Not Fragile—It’s Fierce

Too often, people speak of optimism as if it’s naïve, as if hope is some delicate, fleeting thing. But hope is not fragile—it is resilient. It is determined. It is action.

> ***“People speak of hope as this delicate, ephemeral thing made of whispers and spider webs. It’s not. Hope has dirt on her face, blood on her knuckles, the grit of the cobblestones in her hair, and just spat out a tooth as she rises for another go.”*** **– @CrowsFault**

This is the kind of hope that research administration needs. Not wishful thinking, but informed optimism—the kind that acknowledges the obstacles ahead yet refuses to be defeated by them.

> ***“Informed optimism doesn’t mean you only look at the bright side. It means you don’t overlook the bright side.”*** **– Adam Grant**

Hope in research administration means facing challenges with grit and perseverance. It means recognizing difficulties but pushing forward anyway. It means finding solutions where others see roadblocks. It means getting back up, no matter how often the landscape shifts beneath us. Hope is not just a feeling, it’s a force that propels us forward, inspiring us to keep striving for progress.

Now Is the Time to Step Forward

The future of research administration will be shaped by those willing to lead through change, not just endure it. That time is now.

Institutions must develop structured change management plans, ensuring clear communication, robust training, and support systems to help teams adapt confidently. Research administrators must step forward as advocates, engaging in policy discussions and pushing for practical, effective regulations. And mentorship—both giving and receiving it—must become a priority because sharing knowledge strengthens us all.

Above all, we must remind ourselves why this work matters. Research administration is not just about compliance and budgets, it is about enabling the next medical breakthrough, cure, and discovery that changes lives.

And that is worth fighting for.

Change is inevitable. But so is progress. It's time to roll up our sleeves, step into the arena, and lead the way.

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GRANT DEVELOPMENT & STRATEGY

The Road You Should Travel: From Research Administrators to Grant Coaches and Advisors

By Jose G. Alcaine, PhD, MBA, CRA

You've heard of life and style coaches— Well, how about a grants coach? Why not share your RA skills and expertise in this capacity? As a research administrator, your advice and knowledge can go a long way in making your team succeed.

Have you heard of life and style coaches who get paid fairly well to encourage and advise their clients on how to keep going, get in there, you can do it, you can achieve your goals in life? Can this same coaching be applied to the Research Administration field as you find funding, and prepare and submit grants with your faculty colleagues?

Research Administrators as Grant Coaches and Advisors

Research administrators (RAs) have transferable skills that apply well to the grant coaching and advising process. No matter your background and whether you are an “Accidental RA” (see related Catalyst article, Alcaine, 2024), you have skills that can help you be a grants coach to the faculty you work with. Are you good at writing and logic? Well then you can offer to read the grants your faculty are preparing for clarity, logic, and look. Then as a coach, make your suggestions to the star players (faculty) you work with who can use your suggestions (or not) to make their grant product better before it gets submitted for the score and possible funding.

Are you good at graphics, drawing, or figures? If so, offer your skills to advise or improve the logic models or figures included in grant proposals. If organization is your master skill, then advise your faculty with checklists, boilerplates, shared folder structures, and more, as you help organize and prepare the applications in a controlled and planned manner. How about numbers and spreadsheets? Then use your skills and advise in budget development, putting budgets and totals together, and matching scope to costs.

Are you good at marketing, social media, newsletters, making short videos or audio clips? Then use your skills to coach, advise, and help spread the word about the research your faculty colleagues are doing. Goodness knows the general public needs to know about groundbreaking and life-saving work happening at your institution!

Better yet, are you good at finding funding? Then use your sleuthing skills to advise junior faculty on internal funding, pilot funding, or career development grants. Work with more mid-career or advanced folks? Then share your funding-finding skills to advise on center grants, training grants, or international research grants.

Don’t Sell Yourself Short on Coaching and Advising Skills

Being a coach implies advanced knowledge in a field or skill, enough so that you can then impart or share pointers and information with others for the success of the team. Many RAs have years of experience in many facets and functions of the grant life cycle. Realize your ability and feel empowered to share your expertise, whatever that is. Even if you are new to the field, your skill set may prove enough to share your knowledge through your coaching and encouragement in the ethical use of technology. for example (notice I didn’t say AI, but it is implied here!), the latest and greatest source for people to find and share their research news.

Don’t sell yourself short on the skills you have and can share with others. You may be surprised as you go from RA to grant coach and advisor! Play ball!

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OPERATIONS & WORKFLOW MANAGEMENT

Navigating the Evolving Workplace in a Diverse Research Administration Environment

By Anita Sharma

Today's workplace is more diverse than ever—both in terms of the spaces we inhabit (whether working from the office, logging in remotely, or something in between), as well as the generational makeup of our teams, spanning professionals from different age ranges and levels of experience. Through clear communication and a culture of inclusivity, how can we foster a versatile and prosperous research administratrion environment?

In the SRAI Coffee Talk (Feb 5, 2025), I joined fellow speakers Karen Mitchell, Marcos Garza, and Rashonda Harris as Moderator in reflecting on the challenges and opportunities of evolving workplace norms, such as remote work and a diverse workforce. We explored strategies to foster inclusivity and engagement in a rapidly changing professional landscape, discussed how to adapt to these shifts, and examined the role of leadership in navigating challenges related to diverse workplaces.

While our core mission as research administrators—to support research communities and enable their success—remains unchanged, our work has transformed dramatically in the last decade, especially during and after the COVID-19 pandemic. This shift has redefined how we collaborate, communicate, and maintain work-life balance. Remote work and flexible schedules have replaced the traditional 9-to-5 office model. During the

Coffee Talk, we asked attendees, “What changes in your work environment have positively impacted adapting to the evolving workplace?"

> Leadership plays a crucial role in fostering inclusivity and building a culture of trust within diverse teams and in a flexible workplace.

Approximately 74% of 128 respondents cited ‘flexible work arrangements’ as the most beneficial adaptation. Virtual meetings have become the norm, and technology continues reshaping our collaboration. Video conferencing, for instance, has enhanced inclusivity, improved efficiency, helped save time by avoiding the commute, and expanded audience reach. However, constantly being on the camera can particularly be difficult for neurodivergent colleagues. While remote work offers flexibility, it also presents challenges, such as feelings of isolation and difficulty in collaboration. In contrast, hybrid working models are seen as more accessible and equitable, balancing flexibility and meaningful in-person interactions.

In addition to shifts in how and where we work, today's workplace is more diverse than ever. Multigenerational teams collaborate, each contributing unique strengths, values, and approaches. Baby Boomers and Gen X contribute strong work ethics, extensive experience, and leadership qualities, while Millennials and Gen Z drive innovation with their tech-savviness and digital fluency. These generational differences bring both opportunities and challenges. While diverse perspectives fuel innovation, differences in communication style can sometimes lead to misunderstandings, inefficiencies and even conflicts, ultimately reducing productivity.

Leadership plays a crucial role in fostering inclusivity and building a culture of trust within diverse teams and in a flexible workplace. Valuing the diverse perspectives of all team members, promoting cultural curiosity and open dialogue about generational differences, and addressing remote work challenges can create a more cohesive work environment. The Coffee Talk attendees’ responses reflected this: while 37% preferred a collaborative approach (team members actively contribute to decisions), 32% and 31% preferred blended (issues are discussed collaboratively before decisions are finalized) and a top-down approach (leaders make decisions with input from staff), respectively, highlighting the need for adaptability in leadership.

Below, a summary of practical takeaways for navigating these evolving workplaces is presented:

Communication and collaboration:

- Establish clear communication guidelines to minimize conflicts and promote collaboration. This is particularly essential in remote work arrangements.
- Recognize and respect the unique generational communication styles to maintain a harmonious and productive environment.
- Offer flexible communication channels (email, phone calls, instant messaging and video conferencing) and collaboration tools (such as Teams, Slack, and Asana) to accommodate diverse preferences and improve remote collaborations and inclusivity.

Workplace culture and inclusivity:

- Implement cross-generational mentorship programs and pair team members from different generations on projects to foster mutual understanding and increase team cohesion.
- Develop structured and effective onboarding programs for new team members that sets a welcoming tone.

Remote and hybrid work best practices:

- Set clear expectations, performance goals, and evaluation metrics while maintaining flexibility.
- Schedule regular virtual check-ins for both work and social engagement.
- Offer mental well-being support to prevent isolation, promote mental well-being, and enhance team productivity.

Educational and training resources:

Appropriate targeted training and educational resources can enhance technological literacy and communication skills.

Providing unconscious bias training to the team members can help the team recognize and address their own biases in a diverse workplace.

These strategies can help research administrators navigate the evolving workplace by embracing flexibility, fostering intergenerational collaborations, and promoting inclusivity. By integrating the strengths and values of each generation, leveraging effective communication practices, and supporting both remote and in-person interactions, leaders can build a dynamic, resilient, and thriving research administration environment.

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GRANT MANAGEMENT & FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT

AAR in Research Administration: Completing the Discussion

By Crina Gandila & Betty Morgan

A strong grasp of allowable, allocable, and reasonable (AAR) costs is essential to managing research funds responsibly. These principles guide how expenses align with regulations, sponsor terms, and project needs. Through careful oversight and collaboration, research administrators help ensure compliance and the success of sponsored projects.

In research administration, the principles of allowable, allocable, and reasonable (AAR) costs are essential to the effective management of research grants and sponsored projects. These principles ensure that research funds are used appropriately, in compliance with federal regulations, and in alignment with the specific terms of each award. For research administrators (RAs), understanding and applying these principles is crucial not only for maintaining compliance but also for fostering financial integrity and supporting the success of research projects.

Allowable Costs: Adhering to Grant Terms and Regulations

Allowable costs are expenses that conform to both the federal regulations and the specific terms set by the sponsor of the grant or award. These are the types of costs that are explicitly permitted under the terms of the award, which could include costs such as salaries for personnel directly working on the project, necessary supplies, and travel expenses for activities that directly benefit the research objectives. For example, travel expenses related to attending a conference that directly contributes to the research goals would typically be considered allowable, provided they meet the organization's travel policies and federal guidelines.

On the other hand, costs such as personal entertainment, alcohol, or expenses related to a companion accompanying the researcher on a trip are unallowable. This means that RAs must rigorously ensure that any expense charged to a grant is aligned with the federal regulations, institutional policies, and sponsor guidelines. The main questions an RA should ask when reviewing expenses for allowability are: Was this cost proposed in the grant application? Does the expense benefit the research project directly? Is it consistent with the guidelines provided by the sponsor or the institution?

By ensuring that only allowable costs are charged to grants, RAs help safeguard the integrity of the research process and reduce the risk of financial mismanagement and audit issues.

Allocability: Ensuring Costs Directly Support the Project

Allocability refers to the requirement that costs must be directly related to the research project or cost objective. In other words, for an expense to be allocable, it must directly benefit the research project and be necessary for its execution. For instance, if a project requires lab equipment to carry out the research, the purchase of that equipment is considered allocable because it directly supports the goals of the project. Similarly, salaries of staff working specifically on the project are allocable because their time and efforts are directly tied to the funded work.

However, costs cannot be allocated to a project if they are not directly related to the project's objectives or if they are for a different grant. For example, trying to purchase supplies for a new research project using funds from a grant that is about to end would be considered an unallocable cost.

To determine whether an expense is allocable, RAs should carefully review the proposal and budget justification to confirm that the expense was proposed and is directly necessary for the research project. If the expense was not originally proposed, it is important to engage with the PI to understand why it is now needed. RAs should also assess whether there is enough budget to support the expense and whether any changes to the scope of work might impact the allocability of the cost. In these cases, prior approval from the agency may be needed to proceed. A proactive approach involves having regular discussions with the PI, particularly during the award's lifecycle, to ensure that the expenses being incurred remain allocable and support the project's objectives.

Reasonable Costs: Judging Appropriateness of Expenses

Reasonable costs are those that a prudent person (like a taxpayer!) would consider appropriate for the goods or services being purchased, given the circumstances of the project. Reasonableness is not just about whether the cost is low or high but also about whether the cost is appropriate relative to the research project's needs and objectives. For example, renting office space at market rates is generally considered reasonable, but renting luxurious office space for a research project that doesn't require such facilities would be considered excessive and unreasonable.

Reasonableness also involves the timing of the purchase. For instance, purchasing equipment during a sale might be considered more reasonable than purchasing the same equipment at full price later in the project, especially if the purchase is not time sensitive. RAs must evaluate the appropriateness of the expense in the context of the project's needs and objectives, taking care to ensure that the cost is not only justified but also necessary for the successful completion of the project. Another example is purchasing a stockpile of supplies or a computer/laptop in the last month of the grant.

When evaluating whether an expense is reasonable, RAs should ask themselves: Does the expense align with the project timeline and needs? Is the cost consistent with the market rate for similar goods or services? Is the timing of the purchase aligned with the needs of the research project?

Internal Controls: Ensuring AAR Compliance

The successful application of AAR principles requires strong internal controls at both the departmental and central office levels. Departmental controls begin at the proposal development stage, where RAs ensure that the proposed budget aligns with sponsor guidelines and that all costs are allowable, allocable, and reasonable. Departments are responsible for verifying that expenses, such as personnel costs and supplies, are properly justified and documented.

> "Regular internal meetings with the PI and other key personnel help ensure that the scope of work remains aligned with the approved budget and that any expenses incurred continue to adhere to AAR principles."

Once the award is granted, RAs must conduct a thorough review of the notice of award (NOA) and ensure that any discrepancies from the proposed budget are addressed. Regular internal meetings with the PI and other key personnel help ensure that the scope of work remains aligned with the approved budget and that any expenses incurred continue to adhere to AAR principles.

The central office plays a key role in providing oversight, confirming that the proposed costs comply with federal regulations and sponsor guidelines. This includes reviewing salary rates, subcontractor fees, and indirect costs to ensure they are justifiable, reasonable, and allocated appropriately. Additionally, the central office conducts periodic audits to confirm that expenses are compliant with institutional policies and the sponsor's guidelines. In many cases, the central office is the only authorized representative of the university that can correspond with the funding agency. Working with the central office ensures timely submissions of prior approval requests that may be needed for rebudgeting, asking for project extensions, etc.

The principles of allowable, allocable, and reasonable costs form the backbone of effective research administration. By ensuring that expenses are aligned with federal guidelines, sponsor terms, and project needs, RAs help maintain financial integrity and support the successful completion of research projects. With strong internal controls, careful monitoring, and ongoing collaboration with the PI, central offices and departments, research administrators can navigate the complexities of managing sponsored funds and ensure that research projects are compliant, efficient, and successful. In an increasingly regulated and competitive landscape, mastering these principles is key to sustaining a high standard of excellence in research administration.

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COMMUNITY & MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Planting the Seed

By Georgetta M. Dennis, MRA, CRA, CPRA, CFRA

How does one find themselves in the world of research administration? This segment of SRAI's Catalyst shares these stories. From a chance encounter at a conference booth to a spark that kinders a dream… It turns out, a brief conversation can make a big difference!

Many years ago, at a research administration conference, I stopped by the Research Administration Certification Council (RACC) booth for some cool swag—and ended up with the desire to study for the Certified Research Administrator (CRA) exam. One brief conversation changed my day-to-day work life from a *job* to a *career.*

I had found my circle! Research Administrators are engaging, enlightening, and encouraging. The conference flew by, as I was constantly amazed by the breadth of knowledge shared about research happening around the globe. I learned how to communicate to researchers that I was a team member, and I became hopeful that I could be effective both on and off my institutional campus.

I quietly began studying for the CRA. I joined study groups, sought out study tips from certified colleagues, and set a timeline for completion. There were times when I doubted myself, but I persevered, and I am so thankful I did! After the CRA, I decided to pursue the Certified Pre-Award Research Administrator (CPRA). My desire to continuously seek knowledge that would allow me to better support the departmental faculty eventually led me to earn the Certified Financial Research Administrator (CFRA) as well. Was obtaining all three RACC certifications the end of my learning curve? Absolutely not! I then decided to pursue a master's in research administration.

I encouraged others to achieve the CRA. I organized study groups on my campus and shared all the helpful resources that had been so generously shared with me. Then one day, I received an email about an opportunity to serve on the RACC Board of Directors. I self-nominated- once, twice- and finally, on the third try, I was selected for an interview and offered a position on the board.

What an honor it is to serve alongside some of the most amazing research administrators in the field! We recognize the value of our certifications and have a passion for advancing the profession.

My journey with RACC has been incredibly rewarding. I have built friendships that will outlast my term on the board as well as my time in research administration. I'm so thankful for the many lessons and for the hard work of the directors that came before me. I know our current board of directors will continue to uphold everything RACC represents as we champion certification and lifelong learning in this field.

I was recently asked what I consider to be my greatest contribution to research administration. My response? I'm not sure I've achieved it...yet. I would like to believe the best is still to come!

I hope I've planted a seed in someone reading this—encouraging them to believe in themselves, invest in their growth, and give back to others. Surround yourself with those that engage, enlighten, and encourage you to be the very best version of yourself—because, in this profession and in life, we all get by with a little help from our friends!

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REGULATORY & COMPLIANCE OVERSIGHT

The Seven Basic Elements of a Successful Compliance Program

By Tonya Edvalson

Seven core elements—shaped by decades of oversight and evolving research standards—offer a flexible foundation for building strong compliance programs. With guidance on policies, leadership, training, communication, and corrective action, the framework supports transparency and accountability across diverse institutional settings.

Lessons learned and the basic elements of a successful compliance program have been developed by the US. Department of Health and Human Services Office of Inspector General (OIG) reflecting over 25 years of monitoring Corporate Integrity Agreements (CIAs). In addition, they have considered feedback from research stakeholders as well as the constantly evolving changes in technology and research.

These elements include the following:

1. Written Policies and Procedures
2. Compliance Leadership and Oversight
3. Training and Education
4. Effective Lines of Communication with the Compliance Officer and Disclosure Program
5. Enforcing Standards: Consequences and Incentives
6. Risk Assessment, Auditing, and Monitoring
7. Responding to Detected Offenses and Developing Corrective Action Plans

Element 1: Written Policies and Procedures

Organizations can implement a Code of Conduct to outline how researchers and their teams can meet the goals, mission, and ethical conduct of research. By ensuring that written policies and procedures are available to the relevant individuals in a centralized way, the requirements to meet the code of conduct are more transparent.

Element 2: Compliance Leadership and Oversight

"The United States Sentencing Commission's Guidelines require that an entity's 'governing authority shall be knowledgeable about the content and operation of the compliance and ethics program and shall exercise reasonable oversight with respect to the implementation and effectiveness of the compliance and ethics program."

Organizations should consider three key components:

Compliance Officer: Leadership should appoint and support a Compliance Officer with clear reporting structure, including direct access to the CEO/ President, Compliance Committee, and Board.

Compliance Committee: This committee works with the Compliance Officer and Board to develop policies and procedures, appropriate training, and ongoing oversight of the compliance program.

Board Compliance Oversight: The Board is responsible to oversee the compliance officer and compliance program.

Element 3: Training and Education

The Compliance Officer and Compliance Committee should identify educational needs that are specific to the entity. This training should include aspects of the compliance program, regulations, and board governance. Targeted training needs to be considered for the various roles and responsibilities of the researchers, their teams, and the compliance program leadership.

Element 4: Effective Lines of Communication with the Compliance Officer and Disclosure Program

Opportunities for all stakeholders to communicate with the Compliance Officer should be made available in as many venues as possible (e.g., phone, email, confidential reporting programs). Confidentiality and non-retaliation need to be available so that open communication can occur. Consider your organization's ways of incentivizing compliance through recognizing compliance goals that were met or other contributions to the program.

Element 5: Enforcing Standards – Consequences and Incentives

Your organization should have defined processes that address a report that may require further investigation or consequences for non-compliance. These consequences must be enforced, per policy, to deter further non-compliance across the organization.

Element 6: Risk Assessment, Auditing, and Monitoring

The first step in monitoring your compliance program is identifying the risks across the organization. This will identify the areas where your organization can focus efforts and set goals. Auditing and monitoring can be framed around risks identified so that they are consistently applied to all research teams and departments. The auditing and monitoring process should be ongoing, consistent, and reviewed periodically. This review will ensure that an organization is meeting their compliance obligations and re-focus any efforts, if necessary.

Element 7: Responding to Detected Offices and Developing Corrective Action Plans

An effective compliance program will have outlined procedures to investigate violations. Most compliance programs will need to address violations since research is complex. It is important to consider how these are managed, corrective action plans, and reporting to relevant government agencies.

Summary:

This is a just a summary of the OIG's guidance to develop and maintain a compliance program. I encourage you to take some time to familiarize yourself with the General Compliance Program Guidance, which contains more details and tips for a successful compliance program.

These basic elements for a successful compliance program can be applied to multiple types of research organizations. Whether you are working at a small institution, one managing billions of dollars of research funding, or conducting biomedical, social/ behavioural, and other types of research programs, the framework can support a transparent, effective, and ethical structure for managing research at your organization. Follow this framework, regardless of your setting.

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Calendar of Events

Virtual Training Intensives

Jul 8, 10, & 15	Effort Management and Reporting Mini-Intensive
Jul 15 – 31	Clinical Trials Overview Intensive
Jul 21, 23, & 25	Building a Basic Budget Mini-Intensive
Aug 5 – 21	Post-Award Intensive
Aug 6 – 13	Large-Scale, Collaborative, Strategic Proposals Mini-Intensive
Aug 18 – Sep 8	Manager's Toolbox Intensive
Sep 9 – 23	Clinical Research Budget and Billing Mini-Intensive
Sep 16 – Oct 2	Research Contract Review and Negotiation Intensive
Sep 23 & 25	Preparing for a Financial Audit Mini-Intensive

In-Person Events & Proposal Deadlines

Jul 18	Virginia Special Interest Group | Richmond, VA
Jul 24 & 25	Research Leadership Intensive | Arlington, VA
Jul 18	Submission Deadline for SRAI Symposium Poster Presentations
Oct 18 – 22	2025 SRAI Annual Meeting | San Antonio, TX
Apr 27 – 29, 2026	2026 Global Research Management Summit | Dubai

Webinars & Coffee Talks

Sep 16	Coffee Talk | Advocating for Yourself

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