

Research Administration for the University of Alaska
Report of the Strategic Pathways implementation team

October 31, 2016

UA Strategic Pathways Direction

1. Consolidate research administration at UAF with service centers at each campus under UAF leadership.
2. Create dotted line from Chief Research Administrator at UAF (VCR) to VPARR
3. Implement lean continuous process improvement

Implementation of the directions provided by the President and the Board of Regents will be focused on organizational changes and operational agreements within and between UAA, UAF and UAS to consolidate services in the following functional areas of research administration:

- Grants and Contracts Administration
- Research Integrity and Compliance
- Intellectual Property and Commercialization

It is not an overstatement to say that the reputations of the UAA, UAF, and UAS research enterprises depend on effective administrative processes. Efficient services that support core functions are essential for research productivity at all three universities. The UA system has the opportunity to strengthen research administration through consolidation of administrative services to support greater research success.

Organizational Structure

Research administration is a many-faceted effort required to provide essential oversight to our employees, but also to provide the services needed to help our researchers be successful. A proposed organizational chart to meet the UA Strategic Pathways directions is provided at the end of the document.

Grants and Contracts Administration

The UAA, UAF, and UAS grants and contracts administrators support academic, student services, and outreach units in addition to researchers. Under the category of research administration, the primary functions of the “Office of Grants and Contracts” are:

- Grant and fund establishment
- Review of direct cost expenditures
- Invoicing and financial reporting to sponsor
- Effort certification
- Proposal preparation, analysis, and submission
- Award negotiation and liaison with sponsors

- Award acceptance and execution
- Post-Award management and administration
- Policy guidance
- Service to faculty and units, including training and development activities around research administration

Research administration begins with proposal processing, approval, and submission. This includes a basic administrative review to ensure that the proposal complies with all relevant state and federal regulations and university rules. Depending upon the specific discipline and funding agency, there could be dozens of relevant policies and requirements defined in the Uniform Guidance, Proposal Submission Guidelines or in university policy itself. A consolidated UA proposal office must be familiar with all these issues.

Upon approval of proposal funding by the relevant granting agency there are many administrative procedures that must be accomplished prior to initiation of research expenditures. One example is grant receipt and processing which is the precursor to account set-up. All of this must be done quickly and efficiently to enable project initiation. Additionally, there are a wide range of support activities to help with execution of the research.

Grant monitoring must be conducted according to accepted accounting principles. Appropriate accounting and record keeping demonstrate that we adhere to internal control principles. This also allows for quick responses to audit requests from the funding and oversight agencies that we work with. The consequences of a failure in such research administration can be severe, to include preclusion from receiving funds from federal granting agencies.

Research Integrity

The functions of the “Research Integrity and Compliance Office” are broad, but generally ensure safe and ethical conduct of research and adherence to relevant laws and regulations:

Institutional Review Board (IRB) – The role of the IRB is to ensure the rights and welfare of people who agree to participate in research projects that involve human subjects.

Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC) – The purpose of the IACUC is to ensure that use of live vertebrates is adequately justified and conducted by knowledgeable people with proper training in using the most appropriate methodology.

Export Controls – export controls regulate the shipment or transfer, by whatever means, of controlled goods, technology, or services out of U.S. This primarily targets the transfer of certain goods, technology, and technical data considered to be strategically important to the U.S. in the interest of national security, economic and/or foreign policy concerns.

Compliance – the role of the compliance office is to ensure that we are in alignment with respective laws and agency regulations. One frequently used example is the obligation for graduate students supported under pertinent NSF grants to receive training in ethical conduct of research.

Our research conduct must be above reproach in terms of both ethical behavior and accounting. There are extensive oversight requirements associated with the conduct of research in the university environment due to a myriad of state and federal laws and our own rules and regulations. These are in place to safeguard the processes and to ensure our systems function in a fair and legal manner. The proper execution, administration and oversight of research requires a highly competent and motivated workforce; therefore, our administrative staff and researchers must be adequately trained and mentored to ensure that the rules are known and followed.

Intellectual Property and Commercialization

Support services focused on intellectual property (IP) are intended to identify and secure invention disclosures, copyrights, and patents. We also promote the commercialization of IP by seeking licenses and commercialization opportunities.

Lean Continuous Process Improvement for Research Administration

Implementing lean continuous process improvements around a conceptual cost-quality-access triangle can be used within the proposed organizational structure to optimize the administrative systems. The UA goals for cost reduction must not be achieved by diminished research quality or a loss of faculty access to support services. In the long-term the consolidation of core functions will provide opportunities to reduce costs by enabling employees to work more efficiently. In the near term there will be some dilution of service quality and/or access. Performance management systems with mutually-agreed upon metrics and goals to effectively balance these three aims (cost-quality-access) will be implemented as we restructure the University of Alaska system's research administration functions.

Proposed Approach for Implementation of Consolidation

While the basic services required and indeed the general approach to meeting these needs, are similar across our campuses, they are not identical. Time and effort must be invested to identify those areas with no functional differences where consolidation will be relatively straightforward, and those areas with functional differences where alignment of processes and procedures must be investigated, approved, and implemented.

We suggest team members familiar with the functions of each component, but not necessarily those employed in the relevant units, be tasked to explore these considerations.

The challenge is to reduce the costs of research administration by 20% or as close to that goal as possible. Given our current costs for the research administration functions are largely in personnel, savings can only be achieved by reducing the number of personnel across the institutions. Therefore it will be awkward, but critically important to carefully select the members of these teams. Although research administration is to be managed under the office of the Vice Chancellor for Research at UAF, it will be necessary to maintain some staff at UAA and perhaps at UAS for continued smooth execution of research services. If we hope to maintain a reputation of research excellence at UA, we must provide excellent services to all UA researchers.

Suggested Service Areas for Alignment Review

Research Integrity and Compliance

Team members to be determined.

Grants and Contracts Administration

Team members to be determined.

Intellectual Property and Commercialization

Team members to be determined.

Research Administration Leadership

Team members to be determined.