UFIRST
University of Florida Integrated Research Support Tool
Town Hall Notes – July 23, 2013

Town Hall Objectives

The Office of Research is facilitating review of the business of research at UF. The ultimate goal is to outline processes that most efficiently and compliantly route proposals and related documents, collect information, present information to stakeholders who must provide approval, and allow for tracking and reporting. In addition, streamlined award set up with better communication of award management requirements can facilitate improved award compliance. With these improvements, we hope to improve the capacity of the research administration infrastructure thereby allowing reallocation of current resources to move supportive functions and to create space for our faculty to devote more time to their research.

On July 23, a Town Hall was hosted for a campus wide conversation. The objectives of the Town Hall were to:

- Introduce the project
- Identify opportunities for improvement in:
    - Proposal Development
    - Limited opportunities and internal competitions
    - Proposal Routing
    - Supporting documentation and negotiation tracking
    - Award Setup
    - Award Modifications & Prior Approvals
    - Reporting
    - Other

Proposal Development

- A campus wide budget development tool would be useful. However, in order to give up existing spreadsheets, functionality that would be necessary includes:
    - Integration with UF HR data (salaries) as well as other data such as fringe benefit rates, F&A rates and travel information
    - Export to and Import from Excel
    - Standard budget templates by Sponsor
    - Salary and non-salary cost escalation tool
- The question of why do we need a budget for a modular NIH R01 when the agency doesn't require one was raised. The group agreed that this is an opportunity to revisit what the campus requirements are in excess of agency requirements. Generally, personnel effort, equipment and subcontracts are the only pieces of information that are required. The remainder can be estimated through experience of the investigator in the history of performing similar work.
- A central database to help in creation of training grant tables was identified.   Such a tool might encourage more training grant submissions.

- The ability to track current and pending support would be helpful
- Reporting on proposals when the faculty of interest is a Co-Investigator is difficult

Limited Opportunities and Internal Competitions

- Many internal competitions don't pay salary or F&A so departments want to know if they will have cost sharing (even though it won't be documented) that they need to be aware of
- Sometimes someone has been selected and their department administrators aren't aware of it. More transparency or communication into the process would be helpful.
- Because of the variability in how these funds are awarded (subprojects, cash projects, flex codes), they are hard to track. A system that shows what was awarded and how they can be expensed would be useful
- More humanities opportunities might be pursued if the process was more streamlined.

Proposal Routing

- The group generally indicated that most Chairs aren't adding a lot of value in the review process. The administrators do the review and notify the chair of anything problematic. Most don't have time to review the proposal.
- What if we requested denials instead of approvals? A PI could submit a proposal two days in advance and people could have the opportunity to deny. Without denial, the proposal is assumed approved.
- Effort, Cost Sharing, and F&A waivers are the most important things that the chair is looking at
- Clarity on what signatures are required for pre-proposals was requested.
- Service providers such as libraries and museums need to have thorough pre-reviews. These areas' success rates must remain high as they can't afford the time in developing a high volume of proposals without success.
- Some Chairs and Deans are reviewing the science to help support the quality of the proposal. This seemed rare and after significant discussion, there was general agreement that the quality of the proposal is not improved throughout the approval process. Any reviews of the science need to happen much farther in advance and not part of the administrative review. Any way we can help to facilitate such review would likely have a positive impact on our success rates.
- PI's submit proposals late because they have been working on the science, not because they are trying to make administrators miserable. We put too much emphasis on the administrative package when the science or the technology is what is most important.
- Security model of Cayuse is generally accepted by the group
- The group expressed concern with the process relating to funds flowing through UFF. There was lack of involvement of administrators in the review process for "proposals" going out through the UFF. Then when they are funded, the review process is unclear and the administrators weren't sure if they would be going through the UFF or if they should be sent to DSP. Clarity here would be helpful.

Award Setup & Management
Although there was not substantial time to devote to this topic, the following comments were made.

- Because there is not an RA at DSP assigned by department (model is next in, next assigned), there is a lack of accountability, ownership and a challenge to communication. The C&G model where each department has an assigned person was preferred.
- Office of Technology Licensing review of projects for Intellectual Property seems to take a lot of time and users don't have transparency into the process.
- Just because a new project is assigned each year, the administrative approvals shouldn't have to be renewed. CAS was an example presented.
- Clinical Trials have a different track and we need to ensure that the process is clearly defined for them as well.
- As discussion talked through the need for better tracking of contacts from the core offices to distribute and collect information, those in attendance thought that department administrators could benefit from having access to work on collaborative projects and awards as well.