PRESENTATION: Update on Research Management Services (RMS): Recent Issues and Plans - Marge O’Halloran

Marge O’Halloran discussed the report that the DOM Research Council provided regarding their recommendations for improvements within RMS, and asked the group for their feedback and comments on the major areas of concern provided in the report. Key issues are as follows:

1. **Relationships** – The report recognized that establishing a personal relationship between the investigator and the RSC is very important and that there is a need for improvement. Ways that RMS is working to improve this include: more one-on-one meetings between PIs and RSCs, more meetings with department staff, and encouraging the department staff to include RSCs in administrative meetings.

   **Comments:**
   - The group agreed that establishing a feeling of trust between the PI and the RSC is very important to the success of the process.
   - High turnover of RMS staff was discussed – departments who had longevity with their own personnel in the past really feel this lack of continuity, and this leads to distrust in the system.
   - With the old system, there was a sense that the RSC really shared in the success of the PI. There seems to be a lack of ownership of the process now, and so this sense of teamwork is missing.
   - The issue of space and resources was raised – some RSCs are being placed in less-than-optimal work environments, with insufficient resources, and it seems that if we were able to offer better tools, and space, we may cut down on turnover.
   - The group recognized the difficulty between balancing the original goal of saving money, while devoting the necessary resources for RMS as an ongoing problem.

2. **Education of Staff** – The report noted that RMS staff do not always seem adequately prepared for their roles, and have gaps in knowledge. In an effort to improve this, RMS has started Research Admin 101 – a training program for new staff, and the RMS Council also plans to shape training going forward. The Research Development Office (RDO) also helps share their expertise with involvement on larger grants when they are able.

3. **Communication** – The report noted that managers seem removed from the work of their staff. They asked for a guide to services, so that everyone is aware of the exact services provided, and RMS is working on providing this. RMS is aware that communication is a very large issue.

4. **Expectations** – The report indicated that managing expectations going forward is very important. Georgina Lopez and Marge O’Halloran have formed a work group which they will both co-chair to review the service partnership agreement to make sure expectations are aligned with realities.

5. **Best Practices** – The report noted a desire to leverage best practices between RMS teams. The RA Think Tank, chaired by Christine Razler, is currently shifting its focus and membership, and they expect that in the future, they will be able to achieve their goals of establishing recommendations to define current grey areas within various processes.

6. **“I’ve got your back.”** – The report indicated that there is an issue with the ownership of the process being unclear.
These minutes are intended to provide a summary of action & follow up items; a few discussion highlights are included.

Comments:
• Faculty feel that the responsibility to submit the grant is theirs alone; they do not feel that RMS staff have a sense of ownership of the process.
• Faculty want there to be one point of contact throughout the process. Because they currently do not have this, it is very difficult to see where responsibility lies. As much as possible, they would like one person to take responsibility of the process from beginning to end. Even if the RSC cannot do everything themselves, it would be great if they were able to act as a liaison for the faculty, as they had in the past.
• The comment was made that the Government and Business Contracts office feels fragmented since the changes were made to the outgoing subcontract process. Handoffs are confusing, and it is difficult to determine who to contact with questions. Marge explained that CACTAS should help with this, since RMS staff should be able to see who is working on what.
• RMS recognizes the value of having one point of contact, and are working on ways to improve this.

7. Ongoing Input – The report expressed a desire to be involved with the hiring process for new RSCs. RMS has agreed to do this as well as continue to offer regular opportunities for feedback. Right now they collect feedback via the signature survey which appears at the end of every email, as well as the larger RMS survey. They are also considering adding additional surveys after major deadlines.

Comments:
• The group emphasized the importance of keeping surveys simple, to encourage participation.
• The group was unsure of the value of the signature survey, and felt that this may be skewed to negative responses.

8. Staff Retention – The report recognized this as a major issue. RMS is currently looking at the root causes of turnover, and now conducts exit interviews with staff.

Comments:
• The group expressed interest in seeing more information on this – is there information that could be shared with the departments?
• The suggestion was made to have RSCs attend divisional manager meetings.
• If RMS lacks resources, RAB could be an advocate for obtaining them.

Additional Questions/Comments:
• Marge commented that the recent funding model change is sometimes brought up to RSCs – faculty are considering charges when deciding whether to submit awards, and Marge encourages RSCs & others to forward those questions to her.
• Can RMS/RDO offer guidance on salary escalations? We currently have no official recommendations, but the RA Think Tank is planning to discuss this topic and hopes to be able to offer recommendations in the future.
• The comment was made that the process of Industry Contracts taking over clinical trials has not gone well – staff seem unprepared and overworked. Marge encouraged the group to share those experiences with her.
• The suggestion was made to have someone come to speak about clinical trials pre-award work, possibly someone from the Industry Contracts Division (ICD); would be good to hear about hiring of new AVC for Clinical Research, etc.

Next Steps: Marge will send out list of exit interview questions.

Charge to the Research Advisory Group (RAB)
• To provide input to the Office of Research, and ultimately the EVC&P, about the needs of investigators and administrators in conducting research and administering extramural funds.
• To guide priority setting and critical assessment of quality improvement efforts in the Office of Research
• To work with the Office of Research staff to ensure the successful implementation of the current Quality Improvement Project
Background

• Department of Medicine Research Council –
  • review & recommendations for RMS (March 2014)

• Meeting with Department of Medicine leadership to discuss Council report, department concerns
Issue: relationships

- Improve personal relationships between investigators and RSCs: need for greater engagement between faculty and RMS staff
  - 1:1 meetings with faculty & department staff
    - face-to-face, Jabber
  - Working in department space
  - Inclusion in faculty & administrative meetings
  - Invite researchers to speak to OSR staff
  - Opportunities for shared pre/post staff meetings
Issue: education of staff

- **Improve education / training of RMS staff:** perception that staff not well prepared for roles, citing RSC turnover as issue, citing concern about knowledge about large, multi-PI proposals

  - RMS has begun new series – Research Administration 101 for all staff, with emphasis on those new to roles
  - Staff contributing to development of training, with hands-on emphasis
  - Specialized topic training – ex. training grants, complex proposals
  - Include RDO in development of large proposals as much as possible
• Improve communication, support & monitoring from RMS leadership & managers: concern that managers removed from the work of their staff, variable involvement with department leadership (chiefs, division administrators), need for guide to RMS services

• RMS needs to inform faculty & department staff regarding how staff are supported & their work is monitored

• Commitment to regular meetings would assist in resolution of issues on more timely basis, for department & for RMS
Clarify & revise the RMS service partnership agreement: time to reopen original service level agreement to clarify and align expectations

A group of faculty & staff have agreed to serve on update group including:

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Issue: best practices

- Standardize best practices & means of efficient operation
  - The Research Administration Think Tank – co-led by Christine Razler & Eunice Chang
  - Review of best practices by RMS leadership
  - OSR Intranet
Issue: “I’ve got your back”

• Define & improve ownership of the application process: perception that this is owned by researcher

  • Work with staff on strengthening leadership in proposal process – framing responsibilities, timeline setting, review & submission of application, management of follow-through

  • Work with departments to achieve goal of 2-way engagement
Issue: initial & ongoing input

• Include department or division leadership in hiring and evaluation of RMS staff
  • RMS is committed to having department / division faculty & staff involved

• Provide better & more regular opportunities for feedback
  • Qualtrics ‘signature’ survey
  • Consider surveys post-major submission deadlines
  • 2014 campus survey results forthcoming – OSR Advisory Board 8/20, broad distribution following
Issue: staff retention

- Identify & mitigate root causes for RMS turnover
  - Exit interviews
  - Sharing information with departments
Next Steps

- Detail department / RMS meeting plans – frequency, mode, key individuals
- Commitment to faculty / department involvement in hiring
- Review exit interview data & development of interventions
- Service Partnership Agreement workgroup
- Best Practices – review & implementation
- Feedback metrics
Additional OSR feedback

• Additional OSR feedback:
  • Contact Marge O’Halloran or John Radkowski
  • Contact RMS Team Managers