2014 ACOR Fellows Final Report Executive Summary

The 2014 ACOR Fellows had the opportunity to visit several college research offices in addition to several research administration units across campus. In general, the Fellows feel that this was a very valuable experience and each of us will take away knowledge learned through this program that is useful to us in our work.

The 2014 ACOR Fellows include: Lori Fetterolf (Research Accounting), Betsy Grgurich (SIRO), Jennifer Taylor-Hillebrand (OSP), Sara Horn (ORP), Kristen McNitt (Engineering), Julie Mitchell (HHD), and Laura Zimmerman (Education).

The following are recommendations made by the Fellows in their 2014 Final Report Following their completion of the program.

University Recommendations

Through this program, the Fellows were able to observe the daily operations and learn about the inner workings of several different research administration units. Although we were impressed with the uniqueness of each unit’s practices, we believe that there is potential to improve consistencies and enhance sustainability to benefit the University in its entirety.

Post Award Database

We noticed that in every College we visited, each unit has developed or is in the process of developing its own tools to manage post award activities. It doesn’t seem to make sense to have each unit put in so much time, personnel, and monetary resources to develop separate databases for the same thing. In fact, it was our observation that within some units, staff may be working on this development outside of typical work hours because they see the great benefit to having such a database. Ideally, what the Fellows would like to see is the creation of a single database for the University in its entirety to track post award activities. Implementation of such a system would eliminate duplication of effort on the part of many research administrators across the University. While we realize this is a large undertaking, we think there are small substantial actions within current systems used across units that we can take now to improve communications and eliminate redundancy. A good example would be to enhance and capture data contained on the Award Summary within SIMS to ultimately populate a larger shared database. Capturing all of the necessary contractual information for post award administration on the Award Summary would eliminate the need for research administrators to refer to the full award documentation multiple times throughout the life of the award.
Though we see post award management as a great need, it did not go unnoticed that there are many other opportunities to centralize information and to create consistency across units. Ultimately, we believe that this would make it easier for staff to transition from one College to the next should the opportunity arise.

**Reduction of Paper**

We believe that there is much room for improvement within the University’s mission of sustainability for the amount of paper that is created and used across research administration units. We observed that many units are still using paper files and in fact many have several copies of the same document. We believe that these units should be encouraged to discontinue the use/creation of paper files or documents. Again, we realize that this is a large undertaking for some areas, but there are examples of units that we visited during our time in the program that have successfully converted paper files and have discontinued these practices.

**Training and Education for Research Administration Staff**

It is noted that past Fellows have recommended training beyond ACES. We are quite pleased that units have recognized this need and that additional educational sessions have been offered to research administrators. It stuck out to this group that there were units that are part of research administration that we really knew very little about until we visited their office and had a more in depth look. Fortunately, the ACOR Fellows program allows for this more in depth look at each of these units, however, each year this program is limited to just a few staff members across the University. We believe that it would be beneficial to develop a higher level overview of the units one would visit during the Fellows Program. This may be particularly helpful for new hires at Penn State. We also agree that exploring other methods of training through videos or online resources may be helpful as in person trainings can be difficult to schedule/attend.

**Training for Staff that Handle Contracts Processed Outside of OSP (MTAs, DUAs, etc)**

It is recommended that once further resources are available (we know that this is in progress at this time) that a general training be offered to those staff that regularly receive/handle contracts. The training, along with the resources, may help to decrease the number of contracts that are sent to the wrong units/individuals.