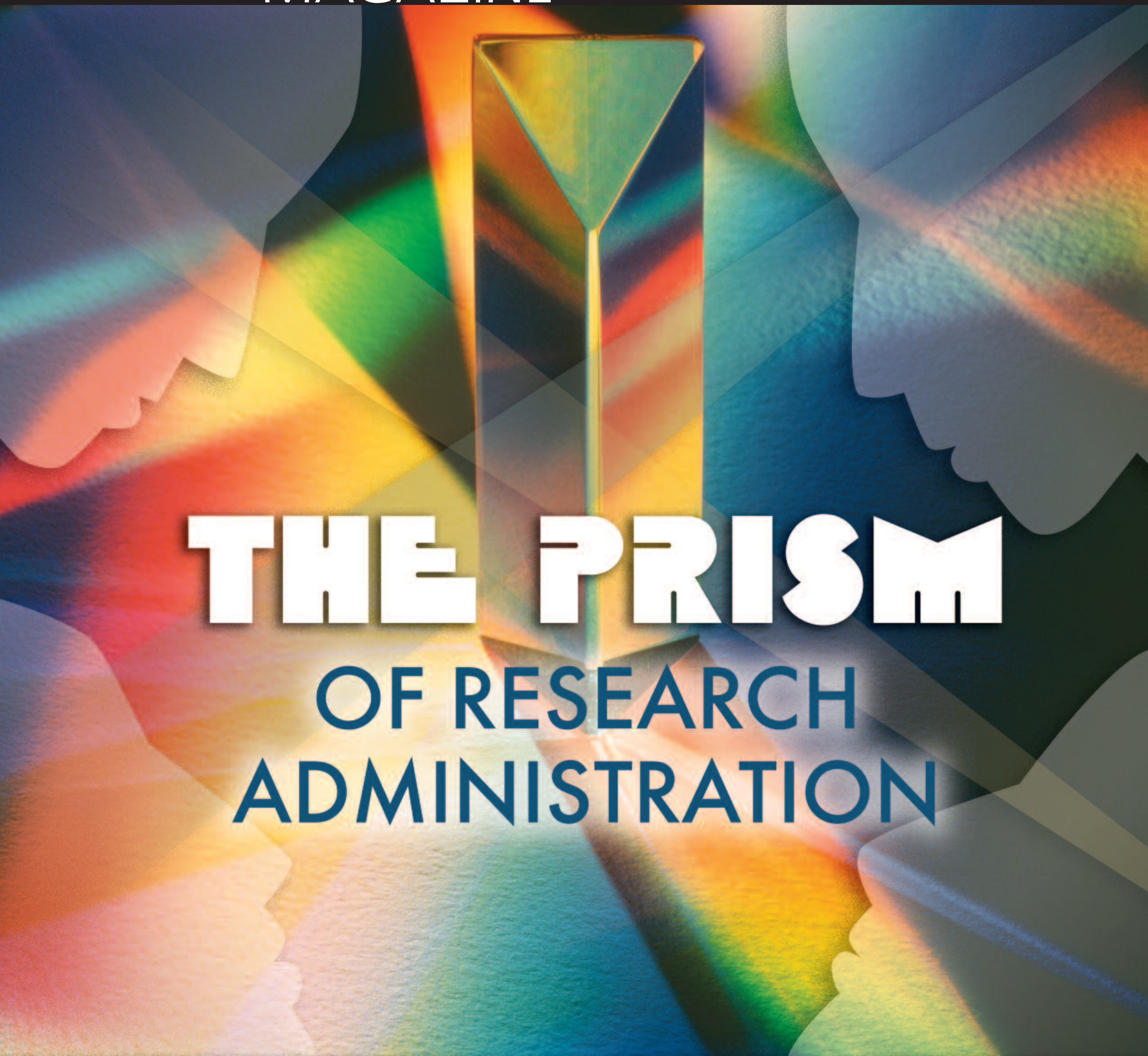
MARCH/APRIL 2016

NCURA MAGAZINE

PUBLISHED BY THE NATIONAL COUNCIL OF UNIVERSITY RESEARCH ADMINISTRATORS

VOLUME XLVIII, NO. 2



THE PRISM OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION

ALSO IN THIS ISSUE

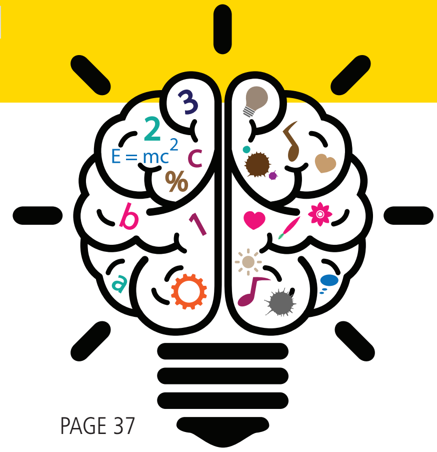
- Same Same, But Different
- Protecting Sensitive Data: A Team Approach
- Research Shared Services: A Case Study in Implementation

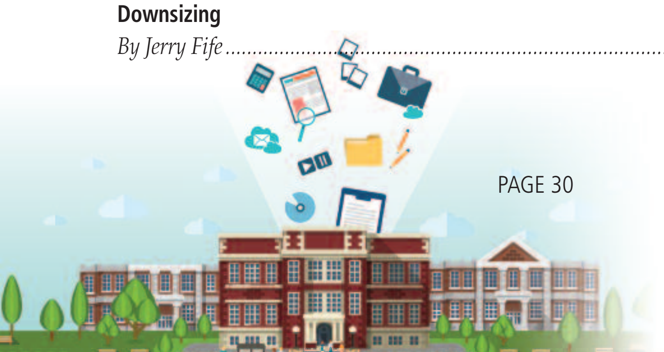
CONTENTS

FEATURES

PAGE 12

PAGE 37



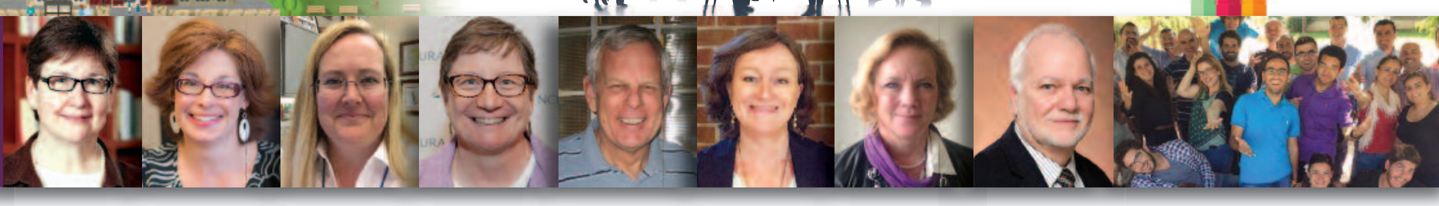


PAGE 30

PAGE 34

PAGE 52

IN THIS ISSUE



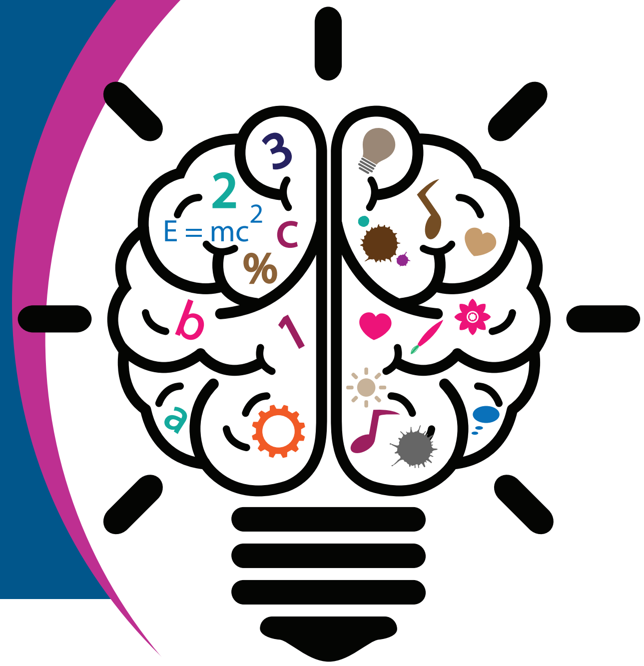
facebook.com/ncura1959

twitter.com/#!NCURA

youtube.com/ncura1959

Research Shared Services:

A Case Study in Implementation



By Jenna Lee, Brian Squilla, and Andrew Steil

Introduction

Over the past few years there has been increasing attention to the idea of shared services as a model for supporting research administration at research-intensive institutions. As with any type of organization, this model has pros and cons. While there is no one-size-fits-all model for research shared services, this type of organization generally has the following attributes: A level of centralization of services that are traditionally performed by local (school/department) research administration personnel, standardization of these services across the stakeholders served, and a Service Level Agreement (SLA) that guarantees support and level of services provided to customers, which can include a feedback mechanism and metrics to measure the quality of support being given.

While various institutions with this type of organization vary in their approach, there are three primary models for research shared services:

1. **Model A: Cradle-to-Grave**
   Grants administrators serve as part of teams or pods and are responsible for cradle-to-grave research administration (pre-and post-award)
2. **Model B: Specialization**
   Grants administrators serve as part of teams or pods, but are responsible solely for pre- or post-award
3. **Model C: Hybrid**
   Grants administrators serve as part of teams or pods, but each team or pod designs their services in a unique fashion—one may have grants administrators responsible for both pre- and post-award, while another may have their administrators specialize.

In the following paper we outline the high-level steps to launch this type of organization at your institution and outline the experience of one university—Thomas Jefferson University (TJU)—to illustrate the business case for this transformation and lessons learned from their design and implementation. As institutions begin to consider this type of model for research administration, it is critical they approach it with an eye toward change management, engagement of key stakeholders, and ongoing communication and monitoring once the new organization is implemented.

Making the Business Case – Do Research Shared Services Work for Your Institution?

The goal of research shared services is to reorganize transaction-based activities that occur in decentralized units and departments so they become the *core services* of a new, specialized organization or group. Before implementing, each institution should have a unique business case outlining the opportunity for research shared services. The business case focuses on the unique needs of the principal investigators (PI), central units, and institution at large. It is important to define why research shared services are a good fit for your institution, which elements your model will incorporate, and what results an institution can expect to achieve.

While some institutions may approach research shared services as a cost-savings measure (as they might with finance, IT, or HR shared services), with research, an organization should think about it as an **investment**. The return on investment for this method of service delivery transformation works by providing high levels of training, professional development, and cross-collaboration to employees, while breaking down organizational silos, and retaining PIs by delivering the services they need with a high level of quality.

Thomas Jefferson University – The Research Shared Service Opportunity

As TJU embarked on a new blueprint for strategic action, one of the areas of focus was high-impact science. The provost's research strategic vision focused on programmatic team science and a diversification of TJU's sponsored research portfolio. Research administration was a major component in delivering the provost's vision. The opportunity was to ensure that TJU's research administrators were positioned and trained to assist research faculty with preparing more complex proposals from a variety of sponsors. TJU also wanted to ensure that research administrators were trained and had the post-award tools to manage the complex grants once awarded. Another primary driver was minimizing TJU's compliance risk for their expanding research portfolio. The purchasing function, once fragmented and inconsistent across departments, became a centralized function within TJU's research shared service center. The goal of centralizing this function was to tighten the controls for purchases made on grants and contracts.

Figure 1

Phase 1: Plan | Phase 2: Evaluate | Phase 3: Design | Phase 4: Implement | Phase 5: Optimize

Phase	Primary Outcomes	Expected Duration
Phase 1: Plan	– Establish project goals, milestones, and communication strategies o Establish project goals and objectives with project team o Develop project plan and timeline o Identify stakeholders for and create steering committee o Identify stakeholders for and create faculty advisory committee, if applicable	3-4 Weeks
Phase 2: Evaluate	– Assess the current local research administration model and provide potential path to optimization to enable leadership to make a "go/ no-go" decision o Conduct interviews and workshops with faculty, staff, and leadership to understand the current local research administration support system o Evaluate service delivery through qualitative surveys to the customers and service providers (e.g. customer satisfaction survey) o Identify opportunities to improve service delivery	2-3 Months
	o Evaluate current IT and HR structure supporting research administration and ability to support new, proposed organization o Propose initial solutions to address opportunities including, but not limited to, governance, organizational structure, staffing requirements, etc. o Conduct impact analysis to evaluate institutional readiness for change	
CIRCUIT BREAKER—Validate the decision to implement research shared service		
Phase 3: Design	– Create roadmap for transformative change o Develop task force(s) in charge of organization implementation, including appropriate committee structure o Create implementation roadmap o Finalize organizational structure and staffing requirements, including job descriptions o Develop and validate new governance model and structure o Design new processes, including enabling technology, roles and responsibilities matrices, and process documentation o Develop Service Level Agreements (SLA), as appropriate	3-6 Months
CIRCUIT BREAKER—Validate the decision to implement select model of research shared service		
Phase 4: Implement	– Provide project management and operational assistance throughout the implementation o Identify, revise, and finalize policies and procedures determined as areas of focus by senior leadership o Document business processes and update documentation and other supporting materials to reflect institutional policy changes o Complete training and deployment planning, prepare facilities and workspace, and finalize transition steps and timing o Review and finalize SLA with institutional stakeholders o Deploy hiring plan o Support units, as needed, to reorganize the work of unit-based staff to accommodate the new service delivery model	6-8 Months
Phase 5: Optimize	– Ensure the sustainability of project goals and optimal results o Identify maintenance plan for on-going training o Implement and monitor new process, monitor progress, and identify/resolve issues o Measure defined Key Performance Indicators (KPIs), implement continuous improvement, and conduct customer and employee satisfaction assessments o Expand technology footprint to support service delivery improvements o Develop/refine training materials to instruct faculty and staff on changes to policies and its impact on the day-to-day operations o Devise stakeholder communications and messaging of policy and process changes o Assess staffing annually as it relates to the size of your institution's sponsored research portfolio to ensure ongoing SLA criteria is met	Ongoing

The vision of creating a shared service model was to provide faculty-centric research administration support across TJU by standardizing processes and restructuring positions. This included enhancing service for all researchers across campus, ensuring consistent processes and procedures across schools and departments, and providing grants management staff a clear career path and an opportunity to grow their careers by providing opportunities for professional development and networking.

Implementation Steps

Implementation is a multi-step process that does not follow a defined footprint. As such, you should allow your institution ample time to evaluate, redefine, and adjust the project implementation timeline, where appropriate. The circuit breaker steps, highlighted in figure 1, are necessary components of any implementation. These defined steps allow project stakeholders to step back and re-evaluate the project goals and institutional impact of the proposed service delivery model. Figure 1 is a sample phased timeline for implementation of a research shared service center.

Lessons Learned

Implementing any new organization has its challenges, and a research shared service group is no exception. Indeed, because this type of office is integral to the success of PIs and research faculty, it tends to garner much more attention at institutions than other types of organizational change (e.g. an HR or IT shared service organization).

While TJU's shared service implementation was ultimately successful, there were several critical lessons learned from their process:

1. **Identify the Decision Makers**: It is important to have a clear leader at the helm during a shared service implementation. It should be clear which person or governing body has authority to make the final decisions. As much feedback as you are garnering during this process, keep in mind there will be disagreements. There will be points of impasse and someone at your organization with political clout and authority should be on point to make a final decision and provide an explanation for that decision. While this occurred later in the TJU implementation, it was not immediately clear in the early stages who had ultimate decision-making authority. This caused some confusion at critical junc-

"…it is important to **create clear** and **broad-reaching messaging** to the research community as the **implementation** moves **forward**."

tures that could have been avoided with a stronger governance structure in place.

2. **Create a Clear Career Path:** One of TJU's stated goals for implementing a shared service organization was the creation of a clear career path for research administrators. In creating the new positions that would be part of the shared service group, an attempt was made to differentiate between levels of grants administrators in order to accomplish this goal. While this worked to some degree, it was not until after implementation that a new grants coordinator position was created. This position became an entry-level job with the primary responsibility for taking on the administrative tasks of each team. This became the gateway position for employees to enter the organization and grow into the grants administrator I role. Had this been clearly defined at implementation, better support could have been provided for grants administrators as they learned their new portfolios.
3. **Define Flex:** A benefit of this type of research administration support is the ability for team members to provide the same type and level of support, no matter what school or department is being served. This is why it is critically important to develop standard operating procedures and an SLA between the new organization and its customers. There is, however, also a need to define the term "flex" within the shared services group. This is often a confusing proposition because many universities are not accustomed to having standardized operating procedures for tasks across schools and departments. Many schools and departments are given almost complete autonomy within the organization for most tasks, and research administration support is no exception. Using team members across shared service teams and flexing support when one team is busier than another is a learned skill rather than something that occurs naturally within the group. This idea of flex should have been better defined at TJU, with pilot groups employed prior to full implementation.

Figure 2

What components of TJU's implementation worked well?

- ✓ **Incorporating quarterly open houses**, whether by team, specialty, or portfolio
- ✓ **Including the purchasing function** within the organization, allowing schools and departments to utilize shared service personnel to order research supplies
- ✓ **Hiring a scientific editor** as part of the new organization
- ✓ Stabilizing support for schools and departments without previous local research administration support increased proposal submissions.
- ✓ Incorporating lessons learned from the research shared service implementation into **future organizational changes**, such as the Jefferson Clinical Research Institute (JCRI)
- ✓ Outlining the difference in service between the central offices and the new shared service organization through the **Service Level Agreement**
- ✓ Creating an organizational dashboard, which is currently sent to research administration leadership on a monthly basis for analysis and reporting, to foster organizational transparency and accountability
- ✓ Establishing a **new culture for research administration** centered around customer service and cross-collaboration, involving both RACE and ORA, and replacing the previous tendency towards "policing"

4. **Phase Implementation:** Inclusion of departments within the research shared service center should span several phases, starting with the units most in need of the service. The last phase should include those departments that previously had established research administrators at the local level.

Conclusion

A research shared services organization has the potential to bring a consistent and high level of service to PIs, while also minimizing compliance risk and ensuring research administrators serving schools and departments are skilled, trained professionals. However, in order to make the transition to this type of organization, research-intensive institutions must approach the process thoughtfully and with attention toward change management and data-driven decisions. Considering the value proposition of this type of change, followed by a detailed assessment of the current state of research administration, is vital. Once a course of action is agreed upon, with clear decision makers at the helm, it is important to create clear and broad-reaching messaging to the research community as the implementation moves forward. Clear messaging and a continuous feedback loop, coupled with clear metrics showing progress toward goals will ensure the shared services organization maintains accountability and superior service now and in the future. N

Jenna Lee, *Director, Huron Consulting Group, has served in interim leadership positions and as a business advisor to universities and academic medical centers across the country. Jenna focuses on research administration transformation and her areas of expertise include organizational redesign, pre- and post-award administration, and business process redesign. Jenna has presented at multiple industry conferences, including NCURA, SRA, INORMS and CAURA, on a verity of research administration topics. She can be reached at* jlee@huronconsultinggroup.com

Brian N. Squilla, *MBA, is the Vice President of Administration and Chief of Staff to the Provost and Dean of Sidney Kimmel Medical College at Thomas Jefferson University in Philadelphia, PA. His responsibilities include oversight of all research administration at Thomas Jefferson University. Brian works directly with senior level management and faculty involving operations, strategic planning and implementation, information technology, human resources, institutional research, and budget preparation. Brian is past chair of NCURA's Region II and current co-chair of Region II's Professional Development Committee. Brian is also a past member of the NCURA Workshop Faculty. He can be reached at* brian.squilla@jefferson.edu

Andrew Steil, *CRA, is an Associate in the Higher Education and Life Sciences practice at Huron Consulting Group. Andrew has experience with research administration operations support, research technology system selections and implementations, and business process analysis and redesign, particularly in the areas of pre- and post-award administration. In addition, he is a member of NCURA and SRA. He can be reached at* asteil@huronconsultinggroup.com