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EXPLORING THE POSSIBILITIES...

NAVIGATING INTO THE FUTURE

Research Administration Operations Assessment: Options for Small/Mid- Size Institutions

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Session Approach

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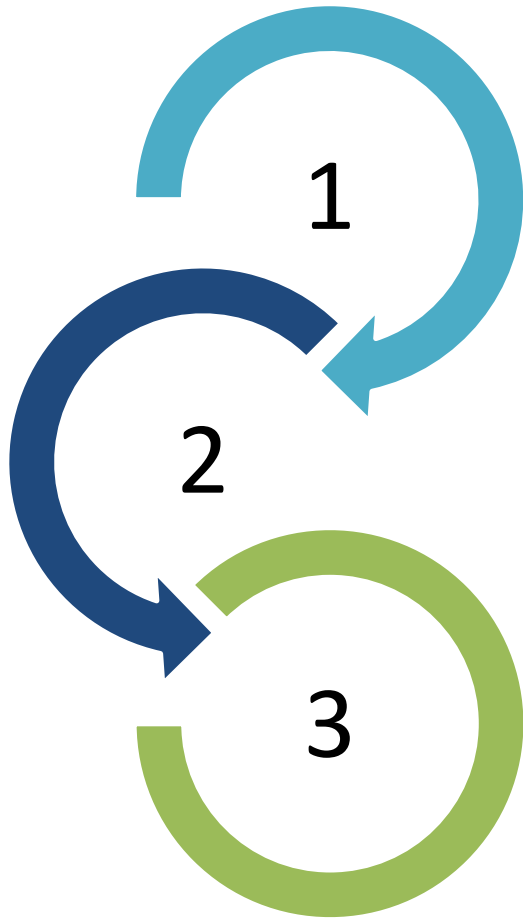


- Discuss how small to mid-size research institutions can take on a research administration transformation effort.
- Examine the approach Grand Valley State University (GVSU) employed to assess its research and sponsored-programs operations, including the implications of the assessment itself, and the successes, challenges, and lessons learned along the way.



Research Administration Evaluation and Transformation: Principles & Best Practices

Research Administration Evaluation and Transformation



Transformation:

Movement from current state to future state

Goal of increasing efficiency and effectiveness while minimizing risk

Impact realization – short-term versus long-term

Research Administration Evaluation and Transformation

Emerging Trends Impacting Research Administration:

Growing and
evolving
research
portfolio

Historical
increases in
research
funding
unmatched by
additional
administrative
support

Changing
skillset
requirements
for research
administrators

Increased
sponsor
expectations
for
accountability

Increased
federal
audit
activities

Increasingly
complex
sponsor
requirements

Focus on
collaborative
research:
coordinating
research
administration

Enhanced
“customer
service”
models to
support faculty

Research Administration Evaluation and Transformation



Research Administration Evaluation and Transformation



Toward Transformation: A Current-State Assessment of Sponsored Activity at Grand Valley State University

GVSU Overview

- Organizational Structure
 - GVSU is a Primarily Undergraduate Institution—PUI (Carnegie Classification: “Masters Large”)
 - ~25,000 students (22K undergrad; 3K graduate)
 - 87 undergraduate and 37 graduate programs
 - Located in Allendale, MI, on the west side of the state near Grand Rapids, MI’s 2nd largest city
 - Hybrid model of sponsored-programs functionality
 - Divides SP functions into financial and non-financial services, supported by separate offices that work in tandem
 - Office of Sponsored Programs (Academic & Student Affairs—reports through the Vice-Provost for Research Administration to the Provost): established in 2008
 - Grants Accounting office (Business & Finance office—reports through the Controller to the VP of Business & Finance)

GVSU Overview

- Office of Sponsored Programs
 - The OSP is GVSU’s central pre- and (non-financial) post-award office for the support and advancement of externally sponsored activity.
 - Current Staffing:
 - Full-time Director (AOR)
 - Two, full-time Grants & Contracts Specialists
 - Full-time Administrative Assistant
 - Part-time Graduate Assistant
 - Part-time student clerical assistant
 - Current Services:
 - Funding searches (handled primarily by the Graduate Student)
 - Proposal-development support
 - Review and guidance for compliance with federal regulations, GVSU, and sponsor-specific policies
 - Facilitation of institutional approvals and proposal submission via eRA system (Cayuse 424)
 - Award review, negotiation, and execution
 - Subawards and subcontracts
 - Industry-sponsored and other service-agreement support* (piloting these services)
 - Progress reports, continuations, JIT
 - Non-financial award-closeout
 - Technical training on all facets of the award life cycle.

GVSU Overview

- Grants Accounting
 - The Controller's Office oversees the operation of the general accounting, grants accounting, accounts payable, payroll, and student accounts functions at GVSU
 - Grants Accounting is not itself a distinct office; it's personnel are integrated into the Controller's staff
 - Staffing:
 - Part-time "director" (Controller; .15 FTE allocated to Grants Accounting leadership)
 - Part-time "manager" (Associate Controller; .60 FTE allocated to GA oversight)
 - Two, full-time grants accountants
 - Part-time Administrative Assistant (Controller's Assistant; .15 FTE allocated to GA functions)
 - Part-time student clerical and administrative support (.30 FTE)
 - Services:
 - Account setup
 - Financial reporting
 - Invoicing and federal draw-downs from PMS
 - Cash management
 - Financial compliance (expenditure monitoring, oversight, transaction review)
 - Effort reporting administration and management
 - Financial award closeout
 - Federal equipment inventories
 - Prep and negotiation of F&A rate
 - Technical training on post-award financial management and compliance

GVSU Overview

Sponsored Award Portfolio for Fiscal Year 2015-2016

- \$21.6 million in awards (excludes financial aid and capital grants)
 - Federal awards: \$12.2 million (56.5%)
 - U.S. Small Business Administration: \$3.78 million (17.5%)
 - Department of Education: \$3.26 million (15.1%)
 - All other (NSF, NIH, USDA, NASA, DOJ, etc.): \$5.16 million (23.9%)
 - State of Michigan awards: \$6.78 million (31.4%)
 - Private funded/other awards: \$1.8 million (8.3%)
 - 3.7% local government awards: \$800K
- Award volume increasing
 - 18% increase in past five years
 - 137% increase in awards since 2002

The Problem(s):

Problem Statement (August 2016)

- Resources, infrastructure, and policies stressed, outdated, and outpaced, creating risk of various kinds (compliance, employee dissatisfaction and turnover)
- Sponsored-programs support structure housed in separate offices, presenting natural challenges
- Challenges complicated further by past strained interpersonal relationship between leadership of the two offices; “new” (April 2016) OSP Director determined to change this dynamic
- Clear need (and great opportunity!) to create strong, synergistic relationship, and to realize greater efficiencies, improve work quality (and work QOL), through more integrated process functionality
- Policies and business processes
 - Dated, incomplete, or missing altogether for important areas
 - Held and managed by separate entities (OSP & Grants Accounting); not integrated into a single, seamless resource that is publicly available
- Culture of decentralization; pockets of “siloes” activity not subject to specialized, central, professional oversight and support
- Evident that comprehensive, cross-functional value-stream analysis (current-state and ideal-state business process mapping for BPI-Business Process Improvement) needed, but these approaches not part of GVSU culture or experience
- Authoritative, external assessment necessary to
 - Validate this insight and “sell” need for enterprise-wide BPI to executive leadership
 - Create a roadmap to address these problems systemically and in an organized fashion
 - Augment and accelerate the relationship-building process the new director had begun with Grants Accounting and expand it enterprise-wide by engaging all stakeholder groups in the assessment

The Answer:

- At NCURA 2016: director attended “Post-Award Process Improvement: Transforming Day-to-Day Operations” on the transformation initiative at UCSF (co-presented by Sonia Singh of Huron)
- Worked with Huron in past; aware of their reputation and expertise and witnessed their outcomes first hand
- After due diligence, pitched engagement to Vice Provost of Research Administration
- In January 2017, engaged Huron to undertake a comprehensive institutional assessment of the policies, processes, and operational resources that support and govern sponsored activity (“research admin”) at GVSU

Project Scope

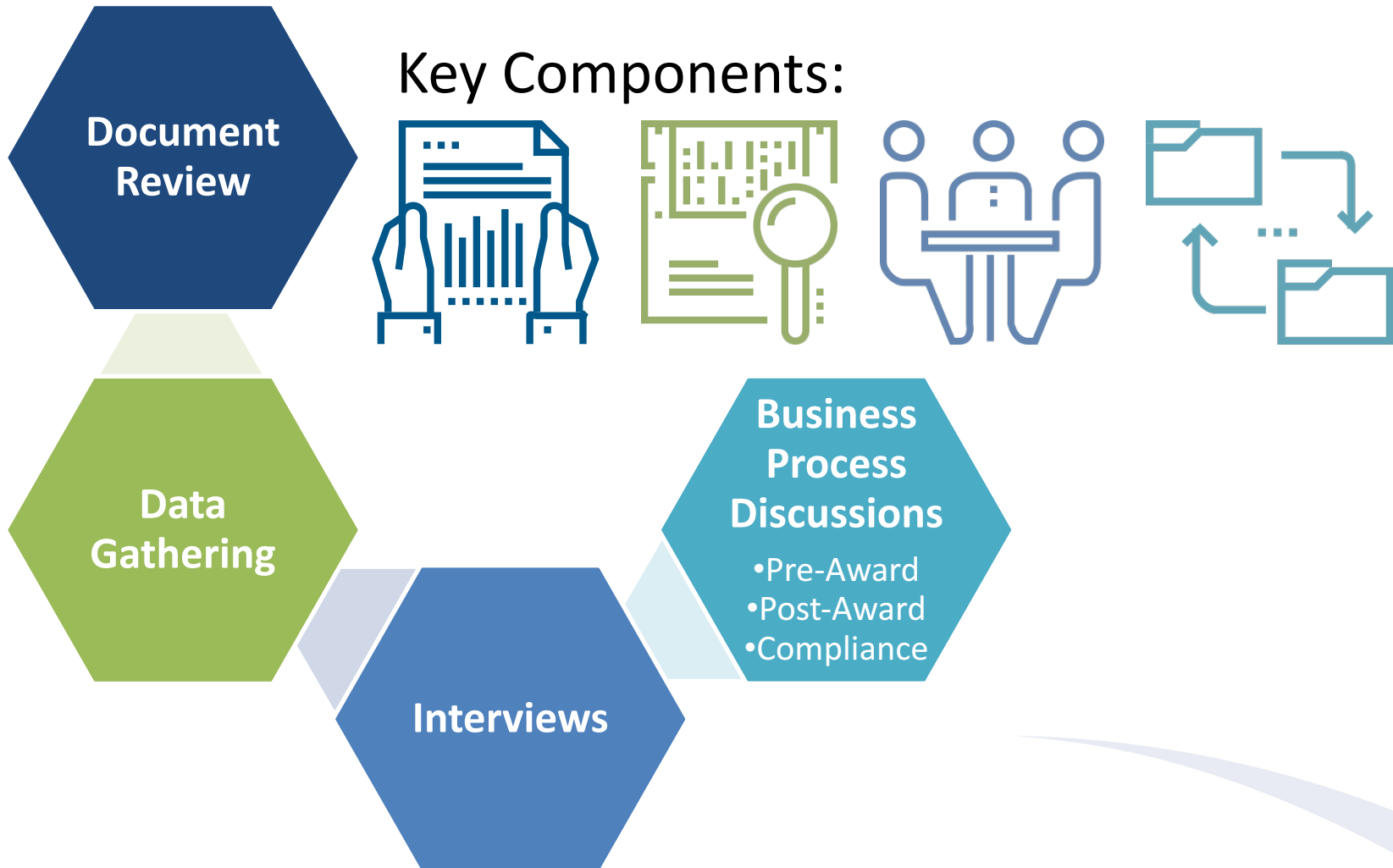
The work scope for the engagement required Huron to evaluate these capacities, resources, and operations, and provide recommendations to:

- Improve alignment of organizational structure and individual roles and responsibilities;
- Mitigate compliance risk;
- Optimize the efficiency and effectiveness of current resources;
- Evaluate the operations against core research-administration performance metrics;
- Improve service to GVSU faculty and staff engaged in extramurally sponsored activity; and
- Provide suggestions on how best to manage long-term costs and identify future investment options in research and sponsored-activity administration.

The next segment of the session describes the general approach Huron employed to carry out the evaluation.

Transformation Process

Transformation Process – Assessment



Transformation Process – Business Processes

Objectives and Outcomes:

Current State

Goal of the Future
State Process

Promote Efficiency and Effectiveness

Risk Assessment

Covering the Gaps

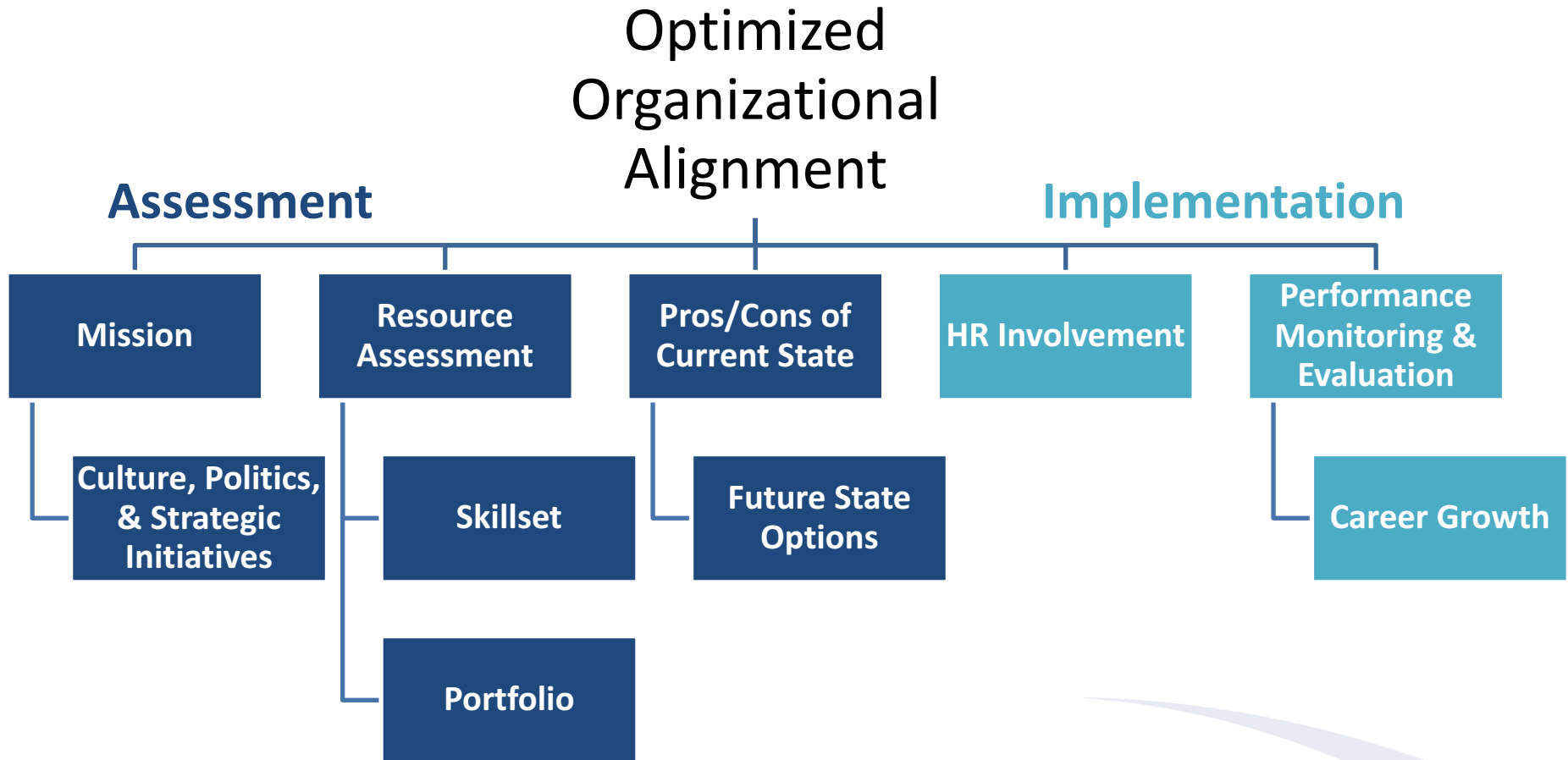
Mitigate Compliance Risk

Vetting and Buy-in

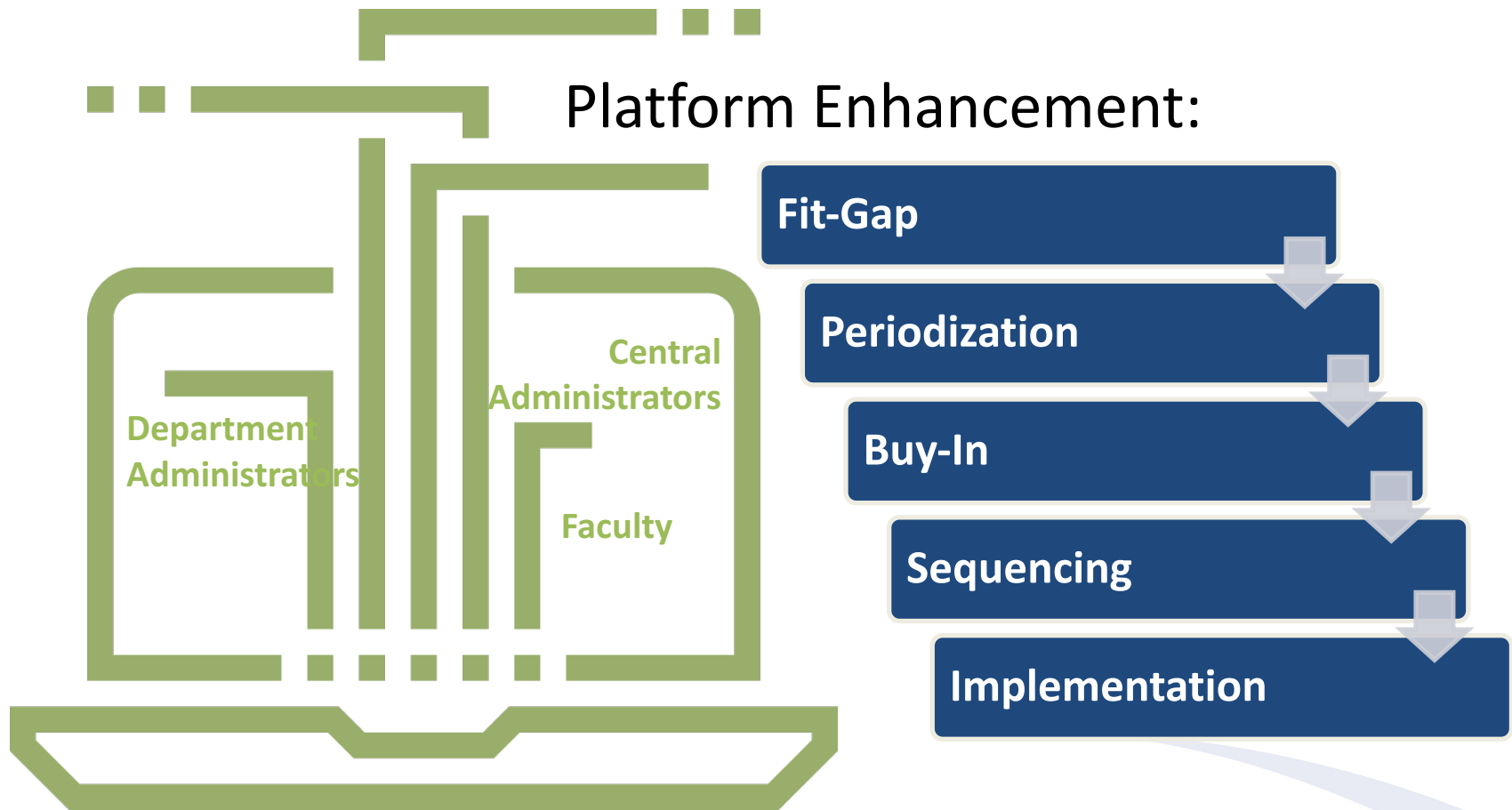
Cost-Benefit
Analysis

Prioritize and Manage Change

Transformation Process – Organizational Structure



Transformation Process – Technology

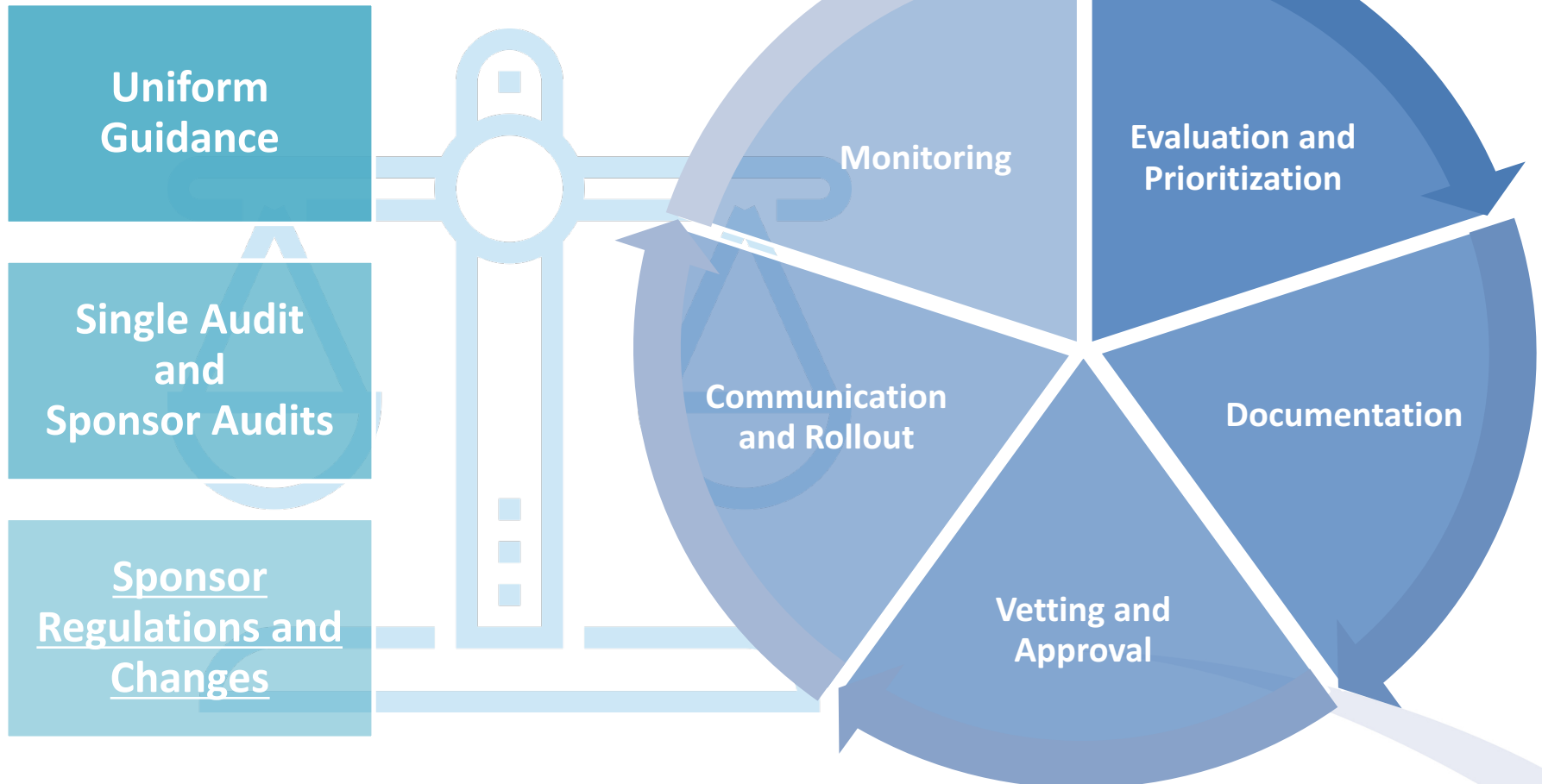


Transformation Process – Training



Transformation Process – Compliance

Balanced Risk Management:



Theory to Practice: Our Experience

GVSU's Assessment Experience

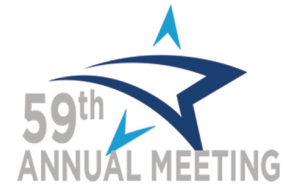
- Data collection
- Recruitment of stakeholder representatives
 - Focus groups
 - Interviews
- Survey development
- Communication to the community
- Debriefing and shaping the final report
- Presenting to executive leadership

GVSU Transformation Efforts

Implementation

- We proposed actions in response to five key recommendations from Huron.
- Progress has been slow...
- ***Huron's Key Recommendations:***
 1. *Establish and promote a research mission, supported by a research strategic plan*
 2. *Create and institutionalize policies that enforce standards and dictate the responsibilities across the research enterprise*
 3. *Strengthen knowledge management and address training gaps to enforce accountability*
 4. *Undertake a business process improvement initiative to address operational inefficiencies and reduce risk of non-compliance*
 5. *Improve research administration support through realignment of OSP and GA personnel and deployment of dedicated support staff to PIs/Colleges*

GVSU Transformation Efforts



1. Establish and promote a research mission, supported by a research strategic plan

- Because GVSU's culture is divided regarding the proper role of research in its broader, teaching-focused mission, proposing a standalone research mission and strategic plan is a sensitive matter.
- GVSU appointed a new provost on July 1, 2017, further complicating the matter.
- Despite these challenges, we recommended the following to the outgoing provost and executive leadership:
 - Form a Steering Committee to explore formulation and adoption of a research mission.
 - Engage stakeholders in the process of writing and implementing a strategic plan to undergird the research mission.
- Progress toward this recommendation is unlikely in the next year.

GVSU Transformation Efforts



2. Create and institutionalize policies that enforce standards and dictate the responsibilities across the research enterprise.

- Established Policy Review Working Group
 - OSP Director
 - Vice Provost for Research Administration
 - Deputy General Counsel
 - Associate Controller (“manager” of Grants Accounting)
 - PI/Faculty representative
 - Director of Admin Services for College of Education (CRA and former Grants & Contracts Specialist from OSP)
- Determined list of 15 policies to develop and institute
- To date, 3 policies are near completion (PI Eligibility, AOR Authority [Expansion and clarification of past policy], and Service and Consulting Agreements) and another is in progress (Cost-Sharing)

GVSU Transformation Efforts



3. Strengthen knowledge management and address training gaps to enforce accountability.

- Procured professional-development funding for FY 2018 to support CRA certification for OSP personnel (Director, Grants & Contracts Specialists)
- Adding 1.0 FTE third Grants & Contracts Specialist
 - Additional capacity to allow development of annual training curriculum
 - Will also enable resources to establish an on-boarding program
- Developing PI Eligibility Policy and accompanying procedure to ensure all PIs and support personnel receive comprehensive annual training (to be required by the policy)

GVSU Transformation Efforts



4. Undertake a business process-improvement (BPI) initiative to address operational inefficiencies and reduce risk of non-compliance.

- Plans in the works to engage outside consultant to facilitate comprehensive BPI initiative
 - Cross-functional BPI team
 - Value-stream analysis
 - Current State mapping
 - Ideal State mapping
 - Establish iterative schedule of BPI (key to success of this approach)
- Goal is to have a single, comprehensive, publically available and easy to use policy and procedure catalog on a shared OSP-GA website
 - Work flows, decision-tools, responsibility matrices, etc.

GVSU Transformation Efforts



5. Improve sponsored-projects/research-administration support through realignment of OSP and GA personnel and deployment of dedicated support staff to PIs/Colleges.

- Established bi-monthly all-staff meeting of OSP & GA
- Discussions begun re: service portfolio re-alignment (matching OSP & Grants Accounting personnel)
- Added 1.0 FTE noted on previous slide
- Timely resignation of OSP Admin Assistant provides opportunity to recruit individual with skills identified as needed in assessment (process metrics, data custodian)
- Advocating for additional resources to be added on post-award financial side (award setup, cash management, data custodian capacity)

Lessons Learned

Lessons Learned

- Overall, the assessment was an exhilarating breath of fresh air for GVSU
 - Collaborative dialogue was the norm
 - Enthusiasm was generally high among assessment participants (Focus Groups, interviews, survey respondents)
- Problems encountered:
 - Resistance to change in some key areas
 - Counterparts unconvinced of need to advocate for additional capacity
 - Ambivalence toward “research” at GVSU tied to traditional teaching and undergrad focus
 - Miscommunication
 - Rework and confusion related to data collection query
 - Lack of understanding of what “Research Administration” is
 - Harsh reality of resource constraints at a public university
 - Total of 5 FTE recommended, including shared (OSP-GA) Data Custodian, 2 positions in GA for award setup and cash management, and 2 specialists to support departments (shared services)
 - All positions well justified; only 1 budgeted (3rd OSP Specialist)
 - “One-man-band syndrome” help hard to come by; ideas great in theory, agreed to, but who will do the work?
- **#1 Lesson: Patience, perseverance, optimism = success!**

In Closing

Key to Successful Transformation

1. “Owner”
2. Mission and Goals
3. Sounding board
4. Understanding of best practices, industry standards and peer benchmarking
5. Flexibility
6. Communication Plan
7. Documentation
8. Address the gaps
9. **ITERATION, never-ending cycle!**

Key to Successful Transformation



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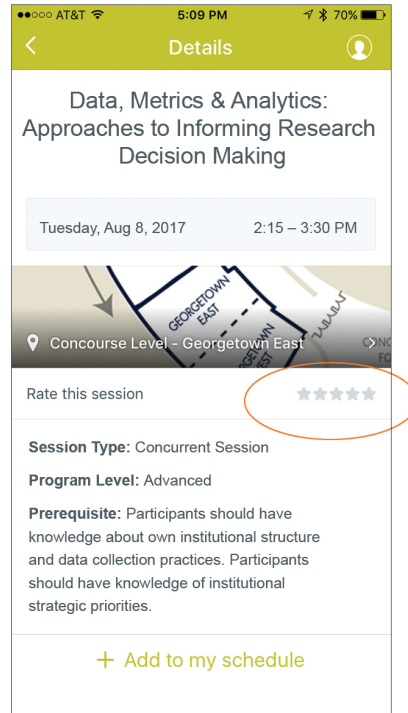
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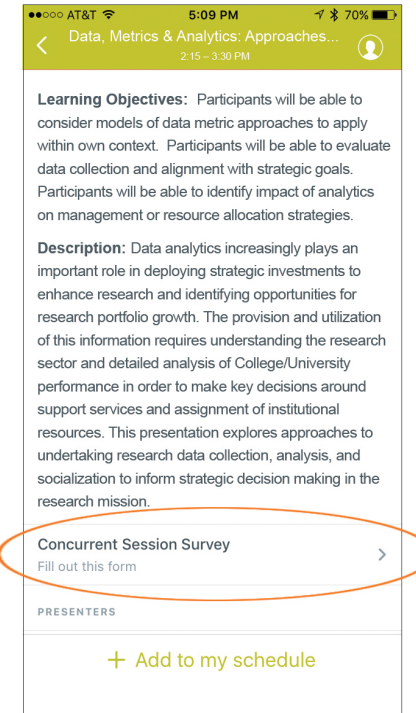
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