

Response of the VP (R&I) to the Recommendations of the Administrative Unit Review of the Office of Research Services

The Unit Review committee provided thirty-six recommendations following from their review of the U of R ORS.

ORS Role and Staffing

1. Engage HR to conduct an external scan of comparable offices of research administration in order to compare staffing levels, position profiles and salary bands. The Manager/Director, in consultation with HR, would then implement the necessary changes, based on the scan. In doing so, this will ensure that UR will be able to recruit and retain sufficient and effective staff.

This recommendation has been accepted. The ORS is working with Human Resources in a scan of comparable offices of staffing levels, position profiles and salary. In addition, a re-assessment of current job duties and re-classification of current ORS APT positions was initiated in Summer 2007 with the intent of establishing clearly defined job descriptions.

2. Once the current profiles/positions have been assessed and revised, new positions created to accommodate increased workloads need to be established and filled. All ORS position profiles should be reassessed regularly by the Director, who should have the authority to hire temporary assistance, reassign work, or determine what simply cannot be accomplished within the current structure. Any changes in staffing (who's responsible for what) must be communicated to the researcher community.

This recommendation has been accepted and the position description for a new out-of-scope Director has been finalized and will be posted subject to final confirmation. A new APT senior research officer position has been hired.

3. Once the requisite ORS staffing levels are realized, consideration should be given to facilitating some ORS staff retreats with a professional facilitator to work on team building exercises (i.e. Stephen Covey Resiliency session and/or 'The Seven Habits of Highly Effective People'), resulting in the creation of mission, values and goals for the ORS.

This recommendation has been accepted and will fall under the responsibility of a new Director once that hire has been completed.

4. Regular ORS staff meetings are required to open up the lines of communication amongst the staff Members from senior administration or other units should be invited to attend on an occasional basis to explore timely issues.

This recommendation has been accepted. Regular meetings are now held with the AVP Research and will continue with the hiring of a new Director.

5. Ongoing professional development opportunities for the ORS staff must be encouraged and supported.

This recommendation has been accepted. ORS staff are required as part of their annual work planning to provide their preferred options for professional development opportunities as part of the budget planning process.

6. The Director needs to play a strategic and advocacy role in research matters both internally and externally. Such a manager would provide leadership in structuring the office, setting priorities, assigning work tasks, defining job descriptions and information technology requirements. In order for the Director to effectively manage these activities, many of the duties currently carried out by the Manager will need to be reassigned.

This recommendation has been accepted. The Manager position has been left vacant and many of the duties have been re-assigned in the position description that has been developed for the new Director position. Also, as part of the re-classification process for existing ORS APT positions, a number of the former Manager duties have been re-assigned. It is expected that the SRO, R&E and Grants Facilitator will continue to provide all pre-award services rather than the new Director. There is agreement with the unit review team's assessment of the criteria for the Director.

7. Effort needs to be undertaken by senior administration to clarify and distinguish its role in policy creation, communication, and advocacy from that expected of ORS. Such clarification should be communicated to ORS, other administrative units and to the broader community.

This recommendation has been accepted. The Executive Team is working to insure that the process for creation and operationalization of policy are clearly defined. With the hiring of the new ORS Director, that member will work in conjunction with the Executive Team to clearly delineate policy responsibilities for ORS which will then be clearly communicated throughout the University.

8. The ORS's role with respect to the research environment needs to be clarified for the community. For example, ORS is responsible for the implementation and interpretation of policy not the creation of policy.

This recommendation has been accepted. ORS has a role to play in providing input, feedback and research into institutional policies and practices, where appropriate.

9. It is the recommendation of the Review Team that the Manager position of ORS be placed out of scope and at the "Director" level. A Director's mandate is to

provide vision, leadership, and long-term perspective in building relationships amongst researchers and administrative units, both internal and external. This leader should act as an ambassador for ORS and for the UR research enterprise as a whole. The role of the position should be to act as the "key" link between the ORS and the VPR& / in communicating and facilitating all aspects of research administration at the UR. This position needs to have extensive administrative experience, preferably in a university setting.

This recommendation has been partially accepted. The Manager position has been left vacant and the Budget Committee has approved the hiring of an out-of-scope Director of ORS.

10. ORS should participate in or coordinate a new faculty orientation program that includes discussion of the resources available for locating funding information and procedures, such as the research handbook and the various mailing lists offered by ORS. Furthermore, ORS should ensure that the ongoing maintenance required for the currently planned research handbook (both electronic and hard copy) be factored into workload assignments because such tools lose their usefulness if not constantly revised and updated.

This recommendation has been accepted. ORS staff have planned some projects to improve communication with the research community, other administrative offices and researchers. A new Researcher Guidelines Manual is under development led by ORS and with participation of relevant administrative units from within the University. It will be maintained in both paper and electronic formats and be widely distributed and accessible to all faculty. It will form part of a training module for New Faculty Orientation each Fall semester.

11. The nature and purpose of the ORS review prior to signature needs to be communicated more clearly and the one month lead time made optional for pre-review purposes. The Director's role in this area should be limited. The review of standard grant applications should be performed by someone other than the Director, who would normally provide assistance only in the development of large complex initiatives. Primary responsibility for the balance of these activities should rest with the Grants Facilitator(s) or the Research Grants Officer.

This recommendation has been accepted.

12. The current one month prior to submission rule, needs to be revised for optional pre-review purposes only and not be mandatory. The imposition of this deadline seems to have resulted in some researchers going elsewhere to obtain the requisite institutional approval. Estimated turn around times for the review and signing of proposals needs to be clearly stated to researchers (and met).

This recommendation is taken under advisement. It will be evaluated once a new Director is in place.

13. Decentralization of responsibilities for review and approvals can be obtained through Departmental and Faculty sign off forms (signatures not to be delegated to administrative assistants) and responsibilities at all levels identified.

In regards to responsibility for reviews, this recommendation is taken under advisement. Discussions will be held with Faculties to determine the extent to which they can undertake reviews. Some Faculties already have a process and staffing to undertake reviews. All Faculties, through the Offices of the Deans, are required to provide sign-off on research grants and contracts.

14. A network of grant facilitators (on a thematic or Faculty basis) should be established to help ensure that applications coming forward for signature have received editorial scrutiny and that ORS provide its own value added to the review process, in a timely and effective manner. Collaboration among all parties should result in better service to grant applicants and consistency in applying university policy at the application stage.

This recommendation is taken under advisement as it may involve commitment of resources at the Faculty level with consequent budget implications. It will be further explored by the new Director of ORS.

15. These grant facilitator positions could be joint ORS/Faculty positions and as such, the funding for the positions would be shared. If hiring more grant facilitators is not possible, consider the creation of an Research Grants Officer (RGO) position (Internal grants and External grants i.e. Tri Council, Gov't grants and grants from the non-profit sector) to work in parallel with the Contracts Officer - each to coordinate with any Research Facilitator(s) to ensure consistency and eliminate duplication.

This recommendation is taken under advisement as it may involve commitment of resources at the Faculty level with consequent budget implications. It will be further explored by the new Director of ORS.

16. Both the ORS and the research accounting group need to collaborate closely and in greater awareness of issues of concern to the other. Professional staff in the research accounting group need to develop the insight, experience, and authority to provide helpful advice in areas that will impact successful financial management, particularly of funding arrangements that will eventually require complex financial reporting.

This recommendation has been accepted. Funding is provided from the Indirect Costs of Recovery program for accounting staffing in Financial Services with a focus on research accounts. Regular lines of communication will be maintained between ORS and Financial Services.

17. The ORS website structure and overall content should be the responsibility of the Manager/Director who should determine what the website is to offer its visitors and who is responsible for ensuring the content is maintained to be useful, timely, and accurate. Staff responsibilities in this regard should be clarified and duties assigned accordingly.

This recommendation has been accepted. The new ORS Director will insure that staff responsibilities in this regard are clearly defined.

18. Workshops on successful grant application writing are valuable in achieving better participation and success rates. They also allow ORS staff an opportunity to communicate institutional requirements, policies, and procedures to prospective applicants at the application preparation stage. ORS should continue to offer grant application workshops and use these events to communicate institutional and office policies and procedures to prospective grant applicants in a timely manner.

This recommendation has been accepted.

19. ORS should facilitate mentoring activities including grantsmanship, internal peer review, matching of experienced researchers with new faculty etc.

This recommendation has been accepted. ORS facilitates granting council workshops and an internal review and mentoring process.

20. Mailing lists should be implemented and promoted as the primary vehicle used by ORS to publicize funding opportunities. The organization of mailing lists needs to be simplified to fewer and broader categories, such as health, social sciences/humanities, etc.

This recommendation has been accepted. ORS has begun the process of using targeted mailing lists, e.g. for health-related research opportunities, and will continue the process of developing targeted mailing lists.

21. The Contracts Officer should contribute explanatory articles for the ORS website and should consider offering workshops to inform researchers of issues and policies associated with contract research.

This recommendation has been accepted. Discussion will be held with the Contracts Officer to identify a series of articles that can be developed each year as part of the annual work plan for that position.

Relationship with other Units

22. ORS, UILO and OICD should co-locate and consider sharing administrative resources such as a clerk/receptionist and perhaps a communications officer. The

current space occupied by ORS is insufficient for the present staff complement and leaves no room for growth. Privacy and confidentiality are difficult in the present physical layout of the office. In considering the co-location of these units, accessibility to the researcher community as well as the needs of a growing staff complement must be taken into consideration.

Relative to co-location of the ORS, UILO and OICD, this recommendation is taken under advisement as a longer-term objective. The Space committee approved a re-location of the ORS to more accessible space in the Lab Building Addition that will address visibility of the office to researchers. That move has taken place. The Office has been laid out to provide for confidentiality and privacy. The Space committee has also made space consolidation for UILO a priority and a decision on the moves of those offices to appropriate space will be made shortly.

It is agreed that ORS should be working closely OICD, UILO, Financial Services, SMS, and Physical Plant. Discussions are underway with all of these administrative areas with respect to institutional programs, research manual development, and other initiatives. We see this as a very important role for ORS in the research community and it will continue to be a major focus of the office.

23. Clarity must be provided as to the role of each of the units reporting to the VPR&I and in particular, where the Contracts Officer fits in with respect to ORS and UILO. Researchers and administrators must be clear on the procedures regarding contract and industry research. If the responsibility for this portfolio is with ORS then all contract and industry research projects must be consistently routed through ORS, as opposed to the UILO or VPR&I office.

The mandates and responsibilities of each of the Offices reporting to the VP (R&I) are well-defined. In regard to the ORS Contracts Officer, a process has been established whereby any request from outside of ORS for services from that position must be approved by the AVP (Research).

24. Consider the creation of a new full-time position within ORS that would coordinate all regulatory/research compliance processes in support of the human ethics, animal care and biosafety committees. If biosafety committee support functions remain in HR rather than moving to ORS, a bridging communication process must be developed between those two offices.

This recommendation will be taken under advisement and explored with Human Resources by the Director of ORS when that position is filled.

25. While it may be appropriate for ORS to assist with post-award issues in the capacity of liaising between the researcher and the funding body, the financial responsibility for the administration of research funds, and the reporting thereof, should lie squarely under the VP Finance. There is a clear need for more financial analysts who are fully dedicated to, and responsible for, the financial administration of sponsored research funding. One of these positions should focus

on financial accounting issues associated with CFI/CRC and this position must liaise closely with the appropriate ORS staff.

This recommendation will be taken under advisement and explored with the VP Administration and Director of Financial Services by the Director of ORS when that position is filled.

26. With the complexities associated with research funding and CFI in particular, research administrative offices must work closely with many other units on campus. Some of these units may not be familiar with research or the research culture. Consider the creation of joint positions with ORS and key units i.e. Physical Plant - where the cost of the position is shared and all benefit from the joint knowledge that is brought to the table. Otherwise, a responsibility of the Director should be the education of other units affecting the UR research environment.

This recommendation will be taken under advisement and explored with other administrative units by the Director of ORS when that position is filled. Any recommendations for new positions or shared positions will be brought before the Budget Committee.

27. There would be a strategic benefit to the institution to build on and promote on-going understanding of its collective capabilities, thus the development of an institution-wide compendium of research resources and expertise is recommended. Consideration should be given to assigning this task within the ORS portfolio, albeit with attention to overall workloads and the requirement to keep such information current.

This recommendation is taken under advisement and will be considered by the Director of ORS when that position is filled.

28. A Research Liaison Officer from each faculty/unit must be assigned to facilitate communication to researchers. The appointment of an Associate or Assistant Dean (Research) in every Faculty is recommended for this position. These ADRs would act as the main conduit into each Faculty for ORS, UILO, VPR&I etc. to communicate, policy, procedural, program and deadline information. The VPR&I should hold bimonthly or other regularly scheduled meetings with the ADRs and professional staff from ORS and UILO in order to ensure the lines of communication (in both directions) are wide open and that a regular opportunity for consultation is available to the group.

There are two parts to the recommendation.

(a) The appointment of an ADR in each Faculty is the responsibility of the respective Faculty. A number of Faculties at the University of Regina have such positions. The Office of the VP (R&I) will work with those Faculties who do not have ADRs to encourage the establishment of such positions.

(b) The VP (R&I) will work with the Deans to reach agreement on setting up regular meetings with ADRs and professional staff from ORS, UILO and OICD.

Databases and Tracking Systems

29. Based on the experience of the Review Team, high priority must be given to the development or purchase of an effective database as this is crucial to facilitating workflow and to providing management information. This work should proceed under the leadership of the new Director. Retroactive population of data into the database is not recommended.

This recommendation is accepted. Work began in the 2006-2007 fiscal year to convert the ORS spreadsheet information to a database format. The work has been conducted through a joint project of ORS and Computing Services. In September 2007 the converted database became available for analysis and reporting purposes. Work in these areas will continue on its development under the leadership of a new Director.

30. ORS and Research Accounting together should be provided with the requisite resources to develop a proper database for the tracking of application and award data. This system should be able to transfer award data to the financial system such that the amount of duplicate data entry is minimized and consistency is maximized. The database would enable reporting on funding application and award data across the institution.

ORS staff have begun discussions with Financial Services to determine the feasibility of expanding the database to include both ORS and research accounting information. This recommendation will be explored by the new Director of ORS in consultation with Financial Services and Computing Services. Any budgetary implications will be brought to the VP (R&I) and subsequently to the Budget Committee..

31. ORS should play a role in the development of an information/database of expertise on campus - who works in what area etc. and provide a "match making service".

Discussions will be held with Deans regarding the best process to insure that Faculty-based research expertise is best identified and kept up-to-date.

32. Included in the grant tracking database under development, consideration should be given to adding searchable database fields that would capture researcher expertise to facilitate research networking etc. Funding agencies often require that applicants identify, in the grant application, the keywords pertaining to their proposed area of research. Such information could be captured in the ORS grant tracking database to allow for quick searches and activity reports.

This recommendation is accepted. The project for conversion of the ORS spreadsheet information to a database will include fields for identification of research expertise.

33. A review of the Human Ethics, Animal Care, and Biosafety application data processing requirements should be undertaken simultaneously with the development of an application and awards database.

This recommendation is accepted and will be added to the responsibilities of the new Director of ORS.

34. The application and awards database should be linked with the tracking of requisite certification data on funded grants and contracts. This would help to ensure compliance with the Tri Council MOU etc.

This recommendation is accepted.

35. In the context of revising job descriptions, consideration must be given to the level of effort involved in posting application deadline information on the ORS web site, the usefulness to the research community of the current presentation, the availability of similar information on other websites, and the priority given to this activity against the other duties assigned to the Grants Facilitator.

This recommendation is accepted.

36. ORS should consider purchasing access to the SPIN database offered by InfoEd. The per annum cost is minimal, particularly for a three year subscription. On-line access to this database will be of value to researchers and grant facilitators in locating funding opportunities. The COS database, while more expensive, can also be subscribed to and its use monitored to ensure its cost effectiveness.

This recommendation is accepted. Currently, significant time and resources are spent to update research funding opportunities on the website. With the large number of agencies and new programs, information content must be updated regularly.