

## **Key Messages Q&A**

### **What is the VPR's Research Portfolio Plan?**

The VPR's Research Portfolio Plan is a document describing the portfolio of change initiatives planned over the next five years that will contribute to achieving research-related objectives within the University's 2015-2020 Strategic Plan and the Strategic Research Plan 2016-2021.

The plan is a tool to help stakeholders understand what the VPR's research portfolio is designed to achieve and to provide a high-level overview of how the initiatives within the plan will be achieved. The aim of the research portfolio plan is to establish the link between research-related strategic priorities and objectives and the work (projects or initiatives) that is intended to advance the University's research enterprise.

### **Why are we creating the VPR's Research Portfolio Plan?**

Stating an objective or a goal in a strategy is in itself not sufficient to ensure that the objective or goal will be achieved. A plan is required that includes a statement of what action is being taken by whom; when the action is to be completed and ideally, what success looks like.

Creating a portfolio plan and adopting a portfolio management approach is an intentional, systematic approach to implementing strategy. It improves the probability of success (where success = realizing the University's research strategy). Last but not least, transparency and accountability are good governance practices.

### **What are we trying to achieve with this plan?**

Our goal is to achieve research-related strategic goals and objectives and ultimately, to advance the University's research enterprise. Specifically, we aim to enhance those factors that help establish a favorable environment for research: funding, facilities, guidance and support, promotion, trainees and programs.

### **We are in the middle of challenging times including some budget cuts. Why is this happening now?**

A research portfolio plan and a systematic approach to implementing strategy is even more important under the current, challenging environment. At a time when internal research funding is diminishing due to operating budget cuts, it is more important than ever for the University to seek and develop different ways of doing things to support and enhance the research enterprise.

### **What is portfolio management?**

Portfolio management (and the attendant best practices and tools) links the organization's strategic and operational objectives to the work and is intended to enhance the organization's ability to achieve those objectives.

### **Who was involved in creating the plan?**

In January 2017, the Vice-President (Research) created the Research Strategy Implementation Team (RSIT) for the purposes of creating, managing and championing the VPR's research portfolio. The team membership includes:

- Office of the Vice-President (Research): David Malloy (Chair), Dena McMartin and Raymond Deschamps
- Development Office, External Relations: Bruce Anderson
- Office of Indigenization: Cheryl Quewezance
- Faculty of Graduate Studies and Research: Thomas Bredohl
- UR International: Livia Castellanos
- Research Office: Sally Gray
- Office of Resource Planning: Brian Christie
- Government Relations: Dale Eisler.

### **What was the process to create the plan?**

Guided by best practices and a few proven, common-sense principles, the RSIT created the plan during a series of five meetings from January to May 2017:

1. Candidate initiatives arising from team members' areas of responsibility – many already in progress along with a few that are planned – were identified, defined and categorized. One meeting was dedicated to presenting and discussing the initiatives to help improve awareness and understanding of current plans and activities across the many units represented by team members.
2. After considering portfolio balance and resource demand versus available capacity, all candidate initiatives brought forward in the previous step were confirmed as part of the portfolio. Creation and roll-out of the portfolio plan is part of this step.

### **What exactly is changing?**

It is important to be clear about why we are calling this a change and what exactly is changing.

As mentioned before, the first step in the process to create the portfolio was to inventory the work. Nearly all the initiatives within the portfolio were either already in progress or part of the lead unit's work plan. So, the work to advance the research enterprise itself is not new and does not represent the change.

What is changing is the way the work is managed. Adopting a portfolio management approach for managing this work is new and represents a change. The portfolio management approach includes the following activities (all are new for the research enterprise):

- Creation of a team responsible for the portfolio of change initiatives;
- Sharing information about the initiatives among team members to improve awareness and looking for opportunities to collaborate or gain efficiencies;
- Documenting the initiatives in a consistent manner in one place (the portfolio plan);
- Communicating the portfolio plan to the University community;
- Regularly reporting progress and status of the initiatives within the portfolio; and,

- Analyzing the portfolio for balance and impact and updating it at least annually to address any gaps or take advantage of any emerging opportunities.

### **How is the plan used? What happens next?**

Going forward, the members of RSIT will manage the implementation of the individual initiatives according to their respective plans. RSIT will meet quarterly to review initiative status and progress and will in turn communicate that to stakeholders throughout the University community. The first quarterly progress and status report will be issued in September 2017.

The RSIT also ensures that the portfolio plan evolves to continue to meet the University's needs. This includes an annual process to refresh the plan by adding new initiatives as required. Changes to the portfolio are not restricted to the annual process. RSIT will aim to be responsive and opportunistic by adding (or removing) initiatives at any time during the year if circumstances warrant.

### **What about all of the work activities supporting the research enterprise that are happening now? Shouldn't they be included in the portfolio?**

The activities of any organization include both the ongoing operations and initiatives that the organization chooses to conduct that will change ongoing operations. While the focus of this plan is the portfolio of change initiatives, there are many important current activities falling within the category of ongoing operations described within UofR web pages of the various Faculties, Research Centres and Institutes, and other business units such as the Research Office. These activities will continue to either drive or support the University's research enterprise.

### **What's in it for me?**

For everyone in the University community, the portfolio plan and subsequent progress reports create a higher level of awareness and provide more information about what is being done to implement the strategic research-related objectives than ever before.

For those who are responsible for or who contribute to one or more initiative, the improved level of communication enabled by the plan and progress reporting is expected to result in greater efficiency and effectiveness. In fact, this has already proven true among members of the team who created the plan.

### **What's in it for me? (Faculty Dean, ADR or Director of a Research Centre or Institute)**

As a leader of a Faculty or a Research Centre / Institute, the VPR's portfolio plan provides you with more information about what is being done to implement the strategic research-related objectives than ever before.

Augmenting the strategy for your unit with a similar implementation plan provides a number of beneficial outcomes and impacts including:

1. Time savings: Your annual report will be easier to create if you have an implementation plan to draw from.

2. Convenience: The implementation plan provides a 'bird's eye view' of the initiatives planned and/or underway within your unit and helps you respond if / when things change (e.g. a new opportunity arises or priorities change).
3. Clarity: The implementation plan helps you communicate your priorities to the University and your colleagues within your unit. This can help the University support you and helps you engage your colleagues. It may even help you manage your finite resources.

These outcomes and impacts are not hypothetical. Rather, they have been proven many times over in many different types and sizes of organizations.

### **Best practices and principles?**

The process used to create the VPR's Research Portfolio follows the Management of Portfolios (MoP™) framework. The Consultant, Research and Development who facilitated the process is a certified MoP™ practitioner.

### **What types of initiatives were included in the plan?**

The initiatives within the portfolio enable or support the research enterprise rather than direct research. All fell within one of four categories: (i) internal changes – structural, process, policy and/or tools – that could impact achievement of strategy; (ii) major, institutional-level funding opportunities; (iii) major events such as a research-related conference; and, (iv) a new or a change to a research-related program.

### **How many initiatives are there within the portfolio?**

There are currently 21 initiatives represented in the VPR's research portfolio broken out as follows:

- (i) Internal changes – 14
- (ii) Major, institutional-level funding opportunities – 3
- (iii) Major events – 2
- (iv) New or change to a research-related program – 2.

### **What are the initiatives? How do you know this is all of them?**

The initiatives, including how they contribute to strategy are described in the VPR's Research Portfolio Plan document.

The current portfolio does not include absolutely all of the initiatives that fall within the areas of responsibility of RSIT members. The team intentionally started with a small, manageable number of initiatives in the portfolio and intend to expand it as the level of portfolio management capability increases. Starting with too large of a portfolio can cause overload and lead to abandoning portfolio management before it has a chance to show value. While adopting a portfolio management approach will begin to yield benefits quickly, achieving high performance can take years.

A lesson learned from other organizations was to not expect nor wait for perfection (e.g. perfect information about each initiative; the perfect portfolio composition; or perfect timing in the strategic planning cycle to start managing the portfolio). We are better off to acknowledge the gaps and work toward closing them. Others have shown that it is important, as soon as possible, to define a plan and begin to track and report progress toward achieving the plan.

### **What difference will the initiatives make?**

Earlier, we stated that the current challenging operating environment makes it more important than ever for the University to seek and develop different ways of doing things to support and enhance the research enterprise. Creating and communicating this plan represents one step toward doing things differently as does regularly scheduled reporting on progress and status of initiatives within the plan.

The initiatives within the portfolio contribute to the following outcomes and impacts:

- 1. Improved awareness internally.** The VPR's research portfolio plan along with longer-term plans for Faculties, Research Centres and Institutes, and strategic research clusters all linked to the planned major research roadmap will provide an unprecedented level of transparency and awareness of activities for all internal stakeholders.
- 2. Improved awareness externally.** The major event-related initiatives (CONAHEC conference and Congress 2018) provide opportunities to showcase University of Regina research. Engagement plans for government stakeholders at both the federal and provincial levels as well as for international stakeholders will improve the awareness of University of Regina research excellence and may lead to new partnerships, collaborations and sources of research funding.
- 3. New research capacity and capabilities.** The major funding opportunities, the new/changed research-related programs, the Indigenous research ethics board, the data centre / RDC initiation and the energy hub initiation are all aimed at adding new research capacity and capabilities.
- 4. Diversified sources of funding.** By working more closely with the Development Office, we anticipate improved levels of research funding through donations. Similarly, through the international research stakeholder management plan, we hope to find previously untapped sources of international funding.
- 5. Improved efficiency and effectiveness within the current research enterprise.** As a result of internal change initiatives like the new grant management system, the research centre and institutes model and the policy gap analysis, we expect to achieve more efficient and effective use of current, finite resources.

### **Will the composition of the portfolio remain the same for the next five years?**

No, the composition of the portfolio is expected to change over time as some initiatives are successfully completed; others are terminated for various reasons; and, still others are added either as part of the annual plan update process or *ad hoc* as the need or opportunity presents itself.

### **Are there sufficient resources to complete all of the initiatives within the portfolio?**

Of the 21 initiatives, all but five are already in progress. From a human resource perspective, RSIT felt that sufficient capacity existed. There was less confidence that sufficient financial resource capacity will be available for the entire portfolio.

### **What do you mean by a balanced portfolio?**

The concept of balance can be looked at from two perspectives: (i) how the initiatives were distributed across the four categories or types of initiatives and (ii) how their strategic contribution was distributed across the priorities and over-arching themes described in the University's strategy.

**Is the VPR's Research Portfolio balanced?**

There are two instances where the portfolio is not balanced: (i) a heavy focus on the Research Impact priority and (ii) an under-representation within the Indigenous over-arching theme and the Indigenous research objective within the Research Impact priority. Given that this is the "VPR's Research Portfolio" the imbalance towards the Research Impact priority seems appropriate. However, it is desirable to address the under-representation of initiatives directed to Indigenization and Indigenous research.

To correct the imbalance, RSIT can take one or both of two options: (i) add a new initiative if or when one presents itself and the resource capacity to implement it is available or (ii) make Indigenization and Indigenous research a focus when the plan is updated via the annual process.

**What is the greatest risk to successful implementation of the portfolio?**

Significantly constrained financial resources represent the greatest risk to successful implementation of this plan. Short of finding new and innovative ways of acquiring more funding for the internal change projects within the portfolio (e.g. gifts or donations), this risk must be accepted. If this risk materializes and resource constraints impede successful implementation of the portfolio, units leading the initiatives and / or the RSIT will be required to focus scarce resources on the top priorities. A key purpose behind quarterly reviews of the portfolio by the PSIT (and *ad hoc* meetings if necessary) is ongoing monitoring, management and communication of this portfolio risk.

**How do I provide feedback on the VPR's Research Portfolio Plan?**

Stakeholder feedback is encouraged and welcome. You can provide feedback by e-mail to the VPR (VP.Research@uregina.ca) or to the Consultant, Research and Development (Raymond.deschamps@uregina.ca).