

Collaborative Impact of Research & Advancement

A 3 Million Dollar Idea

By Emily Devereux
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As university campuses push to obtain more external funding, both restricted and unrestricted funds, the question arises how an Office of Research and Sponsored Programs (ORSP) and Advancement offices should be aligned at the Predominantly Undergraduate Institution (PUI). Should ORSP and Advancement be wholly separate versus partially integrated? Should a research administrator report to a Vice Chancellor of Advancement or a foundation relations administrator report to a Chief Research Officer, and how should faculty interests versus institutional interests be prioritized while strategizing external funding sources? And, should research administrators even be in the business of helping to secure foundation and philanthropic gifts?

Similar to many PUIs, the responsibility of the Arkansas State University's Research Development office (A-State,) encompasses multiple functions of research administration that are handled by separate divisions at research intensive institutions. The research administrator at the PUI has to be a "jack of all trades," thus the PUI has to devote significant emphasis on workflow structure and balancing of priorities with available resources. Resource creativity becomes an essential skill in accomplishing identification of funding opportunities, keeping abreast of the Uniform Guidance and agency specific guidelines, providing hands-on guidance and oversight of the proposal development process and submission, assuring institutional and research compliance, facilitating contract negotiations and award acceptance, developing and presenting campus trainings and workshops, and cultivating communication between agencies and faculty. With the emphasis on growing competitive research funding and ensuring adherence to federal assurances and guidelines, not much time is left to spend in cultivating advancement relationships with their foundation funding proposal submissions.

Over the past two years, through creative collaboration, which saw Research Development and Advancement becoming partially integrated by team efforts, A-State has achieved impact in both competitive research and foundation funding. This collaborative impact has led to serving both faculty interests and institutional interests in securing external funding, along with achieving improvement in office productivity, specialization and fiscal efficacy.

Cultivating Change. Previously, all funding proposals were facilitated by Research Development, whether they were submitted in response to funding agencies, contracts or foundations. This started to change two years ago when Advancement developed a new position to cultivate foundation relations for the University. In the position's creation stage the team discussed housing this person in Research Development to facilitate focus on strategic submission and growth of foundation proposals, yet the new hire would officially be an employee of Advancement. After much discussion, it was decided it would be beneficial to house the foundation relations position in Advancement's Development office, but the individual would serve as a bridge in coordinating funding and communication efforts between the two offices. This led to the collaboration which became essential for the development, coordination, and management of potential external funding opportunities for researchers on campus. The collaboration has been a catalyst for effectively applying resources for funding submissions and managing restricted versus unrestricted funding.

An advantage provided to A-State by placing a focused foundation relations position in the Advancement's Development office versus the Research Development office includes benefit of specialization for both offices. The workload of the Research Development office at a PUI is at times overwhelming given the amount of proposals and due diligence required in submission for restrictive funding, compliance and the negotiations at receipt of awards. With a concentrated research administration focus, the Research Development office can better provide the opportunity for research administrators to stay abreast of sponsor regulations and federal guidelines, and to make time available for strategizing and meeting agency missions for competitive restrictive funds. Additionally, a concentrated foundation focus in Advancement gives more opportunity to cultivate relationships with foundations, their boards, to match opportunities with foundations' missions and to apply for more asks based on institutional interests. Budgetary resources are also maximized by the position being located under Advancement, as most PUI ORSP offices do not have the capability of dedicating a research administrator position solely to foundation submissions.

Collaborative Organization and Impact. At A-State, we have worked to successfully align resources in Research Development and Advancement to achieve optimal impact in securing both restricted and unrestricted funding. Research Development focuses on the federal and state agency funding, along with association and foundation funding that is considered restricted and auditable. Advancement focuses on submissions to foundations and associations that present funding as a gift or philanthropic support. Funding agency relations and research sponsor opportunities, along with cross-institutional collaborations are facilitated by Research Development, while foundation board relations, service on local and state philanthropic boards and research foundation opportunities are facilitated by Advancement. Although the funding mechanisms are defined by what type of funding is made and which office is responsible for submissions and receipt, both offices communicate when proposals are in preparation for submission. Strategic communication and efforts between offices is vital, as Advancement monitors applications to foundations and industry of which are already tapped by the institution for fundraising efforts.

The coined phrase “*sharing of knowledge is power*” is an underlying principle of the collaborative efforts between the two offices in assisting faculty from the idea stage to the submission phase of the grant process. White papers or one-pagers are shared between the offices, and both offices attend brainstorming and creative sessions. Faculty funding workshops and sessions are co-presented as a team to emphasize cohesiveness. The associate director of foundation relations meets weekly with the director of research development to coordinate opportunities and to secure communicative efforts, allowing both offices to be on the lookout for potential funding mechanisms to match research and programming objectives.

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Again, fiscal efficacy is demonstrated in joining forces and databases to search, identify and submit. Searching for funding opportunities is very time consuming and PUIs are limited both by office size and budgetary resources. With both offices concentrating their searches based on funding type, a divide and conquer mechanism is achieved both in employee time resources and by two different budgets to support funding database subscriptions.

Cultivating Relationships. The cultivation of sponsor relationships is parallel between the offices and in both instances is often time intensive. For research administration, it is cultivating the relationship between the faculty and the program officers of the various agencies, along with forming a working relationship between the ORSP and the policy or grants management offices of the sponsoring agencies. Research proposals have a higher chance of meeting agency missions and aligning with agency directorates’ funding mechanisms when coordinated with the program officer(s) during the proposal stage. Foundation relations strives to build personal connections while raising money through Advancement. It is important for this new position to reach out and make direct introductions to foundation representatives, as this is the best way for the foundation proposal to be noticed and/or reviewed. Further, it is noteworthy to consider the cultivation of relationships with alumni who serve on various boards and philanthropic

organizations. Instances also arise when foundations or organizations have funding mechanisms for both restricted and unrestricted funding and it is important for the offices to make team visits to cultivate the relationship in the best interests of both the faculty and the institution.

Research or Advancement? As often experienced in research administration at PUIs, A-State has to make many situational based decisions, but we look to be as consistent as possible. The determination if foundation funding will be treated as restricted versus unrestricted funding depends on how the majority of questions are answered. If the following applies to the source of funds, then it is most likely handled through Research Development:

- Is funding based on required deliverables?
- Will it require financial reporting?
- What type of final reporting is required?
- Is it subject to Uniform Guidance regulations?

Advancement provides oversight of the following applicable questions:

- Is it considered a donation to the project?
- Is it required to be submitted through a 501(c)3 status?

As always, exceptions do arise. It is many times a joint submission between the offices when the proposal is required to be submitted through 501(c)3 status, but it requires restricted financial management or if there are any restrictions to the project or finances after the receipt of funds.

Reporting efforts reflect restricted awards submitted and awarded through Research Development, and reflect unrestricted awards submitted and awarded through Advancement. As the collaboration has evolved, a separate reporting mechanism is now needed to accurately measure the foundation funds submitted and secured requiring both offices for cultivation of the proposal and post award management.

Quantitative Impact. As PUIs do not all have the same organizational structure, this collaborative effort may or may not be an option at other institutions. Yet, at A-State, we have seen impactful quantitative measurements in secured funding over the past two years. This collaborative effort garnered a quantifiable impact. Research Development has seen an increase of more than \$2 million in federally awarded research funding during the first fiscal year of this effort, and Advancement more than doubled the secured foundation awards at right over \$1 million. As this effort is further developed, we look forward to reporting additional growth and initiatives aimed at this creative collaboration within the PUI. ■



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