Effective Communication in Research Administration
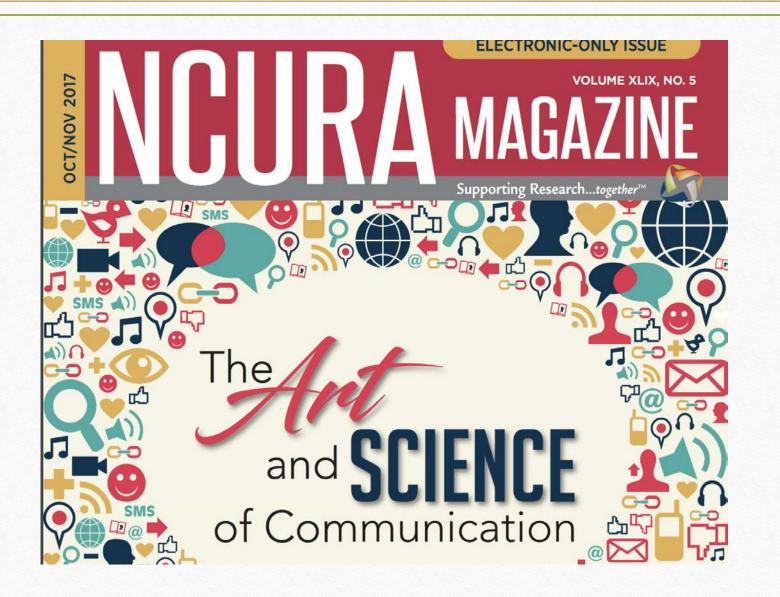
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9:30–10:40 and 10:50–12:00

Effective Communication in Research Administration

- *This workshop will cover tips and tricks for how to electronically communicate information in the research administration environment. Overall, research administrators must be streamlined and clear in their approaches during the lifecycle of an award. This includes tailoring e-mails the right audience and making phone calls or meeting as needed to get the best results. Attendees will participate in interactive activities highlighting best communication practices. The audience should walk away with new strategies to make effective, succinct solutions to common research administration practices.*

Goals of our session

- Reduce the number of e-mails needed to get from question to answer
- Template e-mail messages to streamline common conversations.
- Know when an e-mail exchange needs to stop and a phone or in-person meeting is needed

Background: Start on the Same Page

- I'm not from HR or the Communications Department
  - I'm from Regulatory Affairs.
  - I'm here today to share with you what I've read and learned.
- Research Administration presents unique challenges.
  - It's possible that you may never see the same situation twice
  - As soon as you identify a process, something changes!
  - We may have other roles, but we are here today as part of RA mission.
- Researchers are our customers.
  - We could not do our jobs without research
  - We are the subject matter experts in our areas to faculty, staff, & students
  - Resources need to be easily accessible, consistent, and clear

What Makes a Research Administrator? SRA International Publication 2016

- 148 Research Administrators with <2 to >12 years of experience surveyed by SRA in 2016
- Qualities they find most essential in a research administrator
    1. Knowledge of rules and regulations
    2. Customer service and collegiality
    3. Attention to detail
    4. Problem-solving skills
    5. Ability to handle pressure
    6. Communication and organization skills
    7. Continuous learning
- No one considered math and budgeting proficiency the quality of most importance of a research administrator

Harvard Research Administration Article 2015

- Strong Working Relationships
  - Do you know the colleagues in your department? Do you know what their job duties are:
  - Do you know faculty/researchers? Have you looked them up?
- Trust
  - Documentation
  - Following through with the what's right every time
- Collaboration/Teamwork
  - Are you networking with the members of your department?
- Communication
- Customer Focus
  - Can you be the central resource for someone's needs? Can you redirect customer concerns?

How many of your e-mails can be summarized bluntly by these statements?

- "Where's it at?"

- "How long is it going to take you?"

- "Are you going to answer me?"

- "Uh-oh! Did you do something wrong?!"

Know-Feel-Do Messaging

- Suggested in NCURA Magazine Oct/Nov 2017 by Melanie Hebl

- Know- What is it that I need this person to know? (Information and Facts)

- Feel – How do I want this person to feel about this information and why it is important? (Impression and Mood)

- Do –What is it that I need this person to do based upon this information? (Action Items)

Status Check

- Last week, I sent you an e-mail asking about the status of 18029391. Have you had a chance to look at that e-mail?

- Grant 106425 is closing out. Is it ready to close?

- Have you turned in all technical reports for grant 201932?

How many steps are required for the recipient to complete the tasks you need them to do? Know-Feel-Do could help lower your workload.

Know-Feel-Do Messaging in Action

- Know- You have a sponsor with strict deadlines. One of your reports is due next week.

- Feel- I understand you have a number of things to do

- Do- If we plan to accomplish this task together, I'll need your information by noon on Thursday, 11/16/17.

- If you outline your e-mail in this fashion, you can then put your e-mail message together!

- Perhaps, you can even generate a template.

Talking Templates

- Common business practices can be streamlined

- Provide mechanisms for the recipient to respond

- Before establishing a template e-mail, consider both parties' needs

- Meet to discuss what information is helpful for everyone.

  - Test with a few files/accounts

  - Get a group of people together from different departments to discuss.

When closing out an award, what do you think works best?

- Having a phone conversation about the award and any plans for the account.

- Following an e-mail template

- Keeping internal records in my department, then reconciling with everyone as needed.

- Closing awards is not part of my job duties

Example Closure Template

RESPONSE DUE 01/20/2016

We are in the process of closing grant 208527

In order for us to proceed, please answer the following questions by the date listed above.

1. Expenses in the amount of $435.14 posted within the last 60 days of the project in the Other S&E category. Please confirm that these charges are allowable and allocable to the project.
2. There is a commitment of $1764.10 to post. Please confirm that these charges are allowable and allocable to the project.
3. GR55- There is a GR/IR balance of $397.24 Please address.
4. **Have all charges processed to the account?**
5. **Is the account ready to close?**
6. **Please have the PI verify the accuracy of any charges not previously certified (i.e. salary where effort has not been certified on a PAR).**

Your assistance in this matter is greatly appreciated.

Thank you,

Are Your E-mail Threads Getting Tangled?

- Keep threads separate. Different subject, try to start a new e-mail thread.

- If the information happened greater than two e-mails ago, summarize the conversations. Don't just say "see below."

- Think about it, do you really need to add another person into the middle of a long thread?

- Don't write anything that you wouldn't want forwarded!

- Is it time to pick up the phone or meet? Often, e-mail is better for information than communication. Follow up with e-mail summaries, letters to file, or phone minutes.

https://play.google.com/store/apps/details?id=com.remind4u2.list.sounds.oldphone

To Emoji or Not to Emoji:
I use emojis/emoticons when I…

- Talk to faculty/research staff

- Talk with my colleagues

- Both of the above

- None of the above

Let's Talk Emojis…

- ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺Are you overusing them? ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺ ☺

- Do you want that image in the grant or business file? ☺

- Is it possible that the emoticon or emoji won't appear the same on a different browser or smartphone?

$$☺ \rightarrow ☹$$

- Emoticons should be used to help the message receivers interpret your message correctly or to make the conversation even friendlier.

- A quick response to show understanding might be welcome. But know your customer and their personality.

Critical Conversation -Money on the Line

- You've tried, but you just cannot get the regulatory office to release an account for Professor Hawkings. Several weeks ago, you heard that regulatory was the last step. Now you're fielding several questions about when the $1.2 million award will be available for spending.

- Identify all of the parties. Can you be a central resource?

- Could a template assist in this scenario?

  - Who would need to be involved in drafting this message so that it meets all needs?

- Will you avoid the situation, handle it poorly, or handle it well?

- Which e-mail message is the most important piece to add to a grant file?

  - A message that describes an allowable expense.

  - A message that discusses and describes rationale for a change in PI

  - A message with the sponsor authorizing a change in scope.

  - A message between a business office and a PI about an invoice

  - Who could predict which message is the most important?

- Prof. Jordan has a new grant associating TV and video game watching with poor sleep. His method will involve sleep studies with different times of television watching, screen sizes, and brightness/contrast levels. He would like to know if pillowcases and four televisions are allowable expenses. He also wants to know if child care costs can be added for participants who need to stay in the study overnight.

- You don't know the answer to this question, but you promise to track it down.

  - Poll 4

How do you best help Prof. Jordan?

- Send an e-mail to your colleague, (work bestie) who has more experience.
  - "Are bed sheets and televisions allowable costs?"
- Send an e-mail to the faculty member asking him to detail his study in writing.
- Start with an internet search and find the most informative information, then tell the PI that these items are never an allowable expense and give him the website.
- Access the grant file, elevate the concern to a manager with summary of your phone call, and information about the relevant sponsor contact. Copy the PI.

In Summary

- Your job is specialized because you are critical in a complex system of regulations and financial responsibilities.

- You must know the roles of others around you to systematically assist your customers and predict their needs.

- Communication is a skill we can never stop improving!

- Some e-mails require fact-finding, patience, and outlining to be most effective. This will save you time later..

Referenced Articles

- SRA
  - https://srainternational.org/publications/catalyst/201602/what-makes-research-administrator

- NCURA Article 2015
  - "Renewed Partnerships: Where People Come First and the Business of Research Compliance Follows," http://www.ncura.edu/Portals/0/Docs/Magazine/2015/MayJune2015_NCURA_MAG.pdf

- New NCURA Magazine Articles October/November 2017

- Emoticons in Business Communication
  - https://www.comm100.com/blog/emoticons-in-business-communication.html

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Questions?