Customer Service in Research Administration

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3:00 – 4:00 pm
Workshop Speakers

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Learning Objectives

• Distinguish between the different types of Research Administration (RA) customers
• Determine customer concerns and priorities
• Identify response and communication strategies
• Learn effective customer service techniques
Outline

Research Administration as Customer Service

Determine Customer Needs

Providing *Effective* Customer Service

Proactive Customer Service Strategies/Techniques
RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION AS CUSTOMER SERVICE
Definitions of Customer/Client

- **Customer**: One that purchases a commodity or service
- **Client**: A person who engages the professional advice or services of another

*Merriam-Webster Dictionary*
Research Administration Customers

Department Contract & Grant (C&G) Staff

- Principal Investigators
- Central Sponsored Programs Office
- Other Campus Administrators and Officers
- Sponsors

Central Sponsored Programs Office

- Principal Investigators
- Department C&G Staff
- Other Campus Administrators and Offices
- Sponsors
Definitions of Service

• Useful labor that does not produce a tangible commodity

Merriam-Webster Dictionary
# Department C&G Staff and Central Sponsored Programs Office Services

## Proposal Preparation Assistance
- Coordinate proposal preparation (collecting documents, preparing budget and budget justifications)
- Proof read proposal components
- Submit proposals to central Sponsored Programs
- Submit proposals to sponsors

## Award Management
- Submit Notice of Award to central Sponsored Programs office
- Collect and submit required documents (revised budgets or other components, compliance documents)
- Negotiate award terms & conditions with the sponsor
- Monitor financial expenditures
- Negotiating and issuing outgoing subawards

## Others....
- Training
- Providing guidance and advice
CUSTOMER NEEDS: CONCERNS AND PRIORITIES
## Research Admin Staff Customer Needs

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Principal Investigators</th>
<th>Each Other (SPO and Department C&amp;G Staff)</th>
<th>Sponsors</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Funded Proposals</td>
<td>• Access to Resources</td>
<td>• Compliant Proposal Submissions</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Sufficient Resources for Project</td>
<td>• Meeting Deadlines</td>
<td>• Meeting Deadlines (timely negotiations)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Meeting Deadlines</td>
<td>• Prompt Responses</td>
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<td>• Compliant Proposals</td>
<td></td>
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<tr>
<td></td>
<td>• Compliant Award Terms &amp; Conditions</td>
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</tbody>
</table>
Customer Needs

Meeting Deadlines
- Timely Reviews
- Timely Award Negotiations
- Prompt Responses

Accessing Resources
- Institutional Information
- Training
- Toolkits and Help Guides

Prompt Responses
- Sponsor Admin Requirements
- Regulatory Compliance
- University Compliance

Compliant Awards & Proposals
- Sponsor Admin Requirements
- Regulatory Compliance
- University Compliance
Meeting Customer Needs Leads to Success

Access to Resources → Prompt Responses → Meeting Deadlines → Compliant Proposals → Funded Awards → Successful Proposals
PROVIDING EFFECTIVE CUSTOMER SERVICE
Providing Effective Customer Service = Meeting Customer Expectations
Set Customer Expectations

- Transparency about:
  - Your functions
  - Timelines
  - Information needed to respond
- Stay consistent
  - Going “above and beyond” may create unrealistic expectations
- Review checklists
- Response timelines
Demonstrate Expertise/Competence

• Identify and understand the issue/problem
  • What are they really asking?
• Know your role and responsibilities
  • Processes and procedures
  • Policy
  • Resources, forms, toolkits, etc.
  • If not me, who?
• Do the research and analysis
  • Context
  • Historical precedence
  • Summarize your findings
  • Ask for help/clarification if needed
Solve the Presented Problem

• Solution may be:
  • Advise
  • Answer
  • Referral to someone else
  • Saying “no” – but providing resources

• Formulate the response
• Respond
• Make sure customer knows next step to take
• Follow-up
Communicate Effectively

• Respond promptly
  • Even if just to say you received the request
• Provide necessary information, forms, etc. while being concise
• Be courteous and professional
  • Smile when you answer the phone
  • Let them know you want to help
• If referring to someone else, provide:
  • Reason
  • Contact information
• Ask someone to proofread response
• Use the customer’s language
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Problematic Phrase/Word</th>
<th>Potential Issues</th>
<th>Alternate Language</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>I do not know.</td>
<td>Diminishes perception of your expertise.</td>
<td>That’s a good question. I’ll find out.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I/we cannot do that.</td>
<td>Gives perception that you/we do not want to help; that we are an obstacle.</td>
<td>Here is what I/we can do...</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Just a second.</td>
<td>Does not sound professional.</td>
<td>This may take a few minutes. Are you able to hold or would you like me to call you back?</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>I am to busy...</td>
<td>Does not sound/read professional; gives perception that you think your time is more important than theirs.</td>
<td>Given the time frame necessary for submission (etc.), I am able to....</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Others?</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
PROACTIVE CUSTOMER SERVICE STRATEGIES/ TECHNIQUES
Proactive Customer Service

- Anticipate problems and questions
  - Who are your customers?
  - What are their needs and expectations (of you)?
  - What is the appropriate solution?
  - How do you prevent them from arising?

- Respond quickly
  - As soon as you notice a problem
    - Do not wait for the customer to contact you
    - Identify solutions and suggest them to customer
      - Consult with colleagues, leadership and/or other offices as needed

- Develop strategy preventing the recurrence
Empower the Customer

- Be Proactive, Not Reactive
  - Best customer service is giving customer tools to solve their own problems

- Teach/Train
  - Tell them what you need

- Provide Easy Access to Resources

- Provide Consistent Responses

- Continual Improvement
  - Identify processes/training improvements to empower customer
Effective Website Design

A website is:
- Tailored to the audience
- Provides easy access to resources
- Tells the audience what they need to know

Audience - Department C&G Staff:
- Process-oriented
  - Instructions
  - User Guides and Toolkits
- Easy access to
  - Forms
  - Institutional information
  - F&A and Fringe Benefit Rates
Effective Website Design

Sponsored Programs

Sponsored Programs reviews and submits research proposals, negotiates and accepts awards on behalf of the UC Regents and drafts and negotiates and execute (outgoing) subawards for collaborative research. Select the topic below for more information and relevant instructions.

- Proposal Preparation and Submission
- Awards and Award Modifications
- Outgoing Subawards
- Other Processes

Need Help?

Quick Links:
- About SPO
- Principal Investigator Responsibilities
- Research Agreement Compliance
- Dean/Chair Proposal Review
- F&A and Fringe Benefit Rates
Contain the Foreseeable Chaos

• Customer service should be:
  • Consistent
  • Timely and
  • Contained

• Think ahead about new or changing:
  • Processes
  • Systems
  • Forms

• Create Tools/Resources to centralize questions
  • FAQs
  • Help Desk (Example: OR Cayuse Help Desk)
  • New Employees (Example: eRA Analyst)
Discussions

• What Strategies Have You Tried to Provide Proactive Customer Service?
METRICS FOR GOOD CUSTOMER SERVICE
Determining Quality of Customer Service Provided

- Surveys
  - UC Davis used to send out a survey at the end of every award being processed. Now, we have a yearly campus OR survey including SPO’s performance.
  - Training evaluations
- Number of Complaints
- Number of Questions from Customers
- What are your metrics?
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