

# Culture Change through Influence: A Case Study on Changing the Culture of Last-Minute Submissions at a Grass-Roots Level

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# DISCUSSION GROUP OVERVIEW

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SURVEY TIME!



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# IMPETUS FOR CHANGE

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**PROBLEM:** Lack of Proposal Deadline at Carnegie Mellon

- Stress created by last minute submissions
- For departments, central administrators, AND FACULTY
- Less quality control for Proposals
- Reverse incentives for early submissions
- Culture of last minute expectation

**GOAL:** Implement Proposal Deadline

- Reduce stress at all levels
- Increase quality control (especially in light of new research security requirements)
- Reward early submissions
- Increase RA retention rate
- **Change culture**

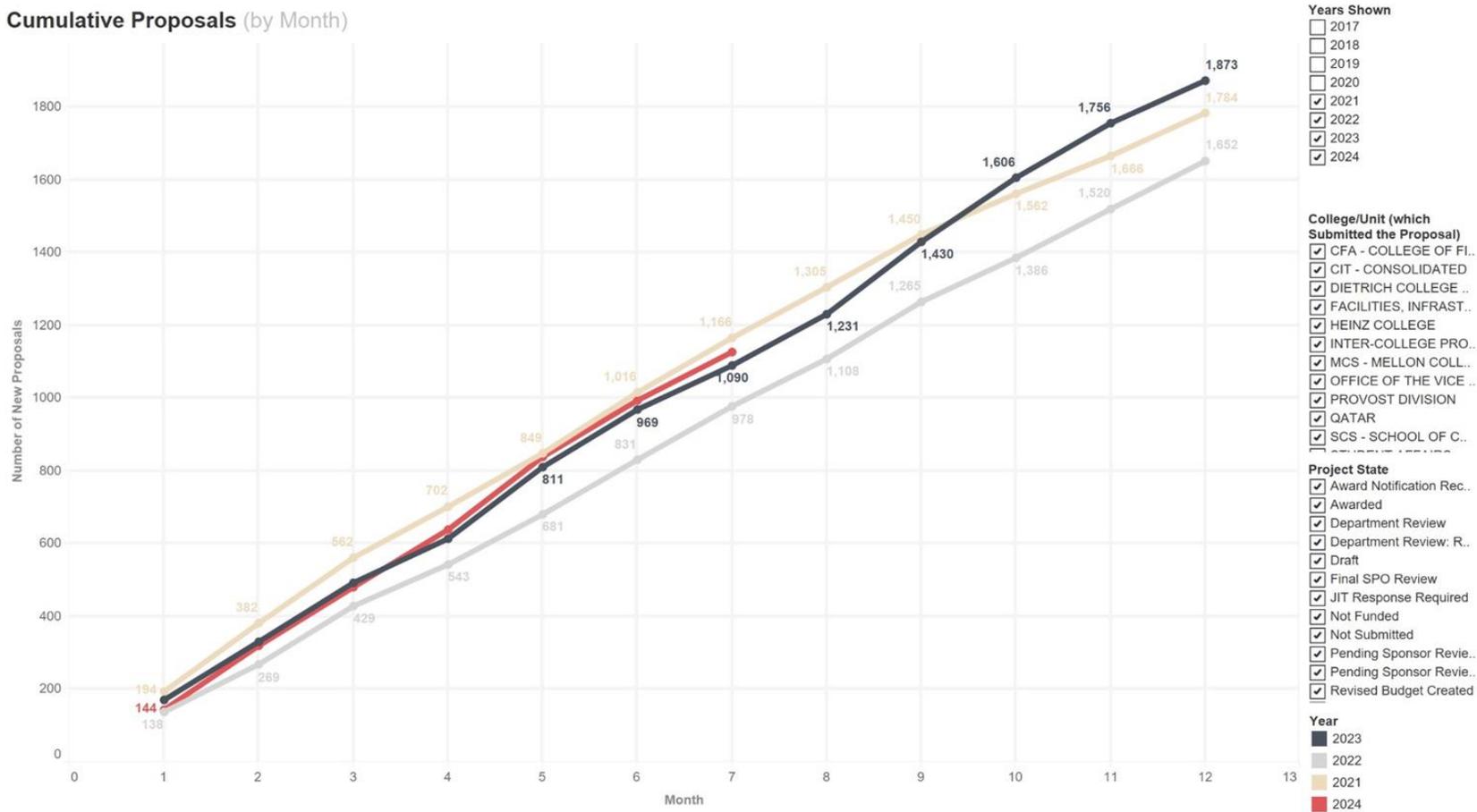


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# BACKGROUND STATISTICS

Cumulative Proposals (by Month)



*754 Tenured and Tenure Track Faculty*



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# PARTICIPANT OVERVIEW

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Based on 2022 analysis\*:

- 43.5% of proposals submitted in FY 2021 were entered into SPARCS (ERA) after the sponsor's due date
- 37.5% of proposals submitted in FY 2021 were provided to OSP and uploaded into SPARCS less than a week (5 days) prior to the sponsor's due date

\*2022 Internal Audit Report



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# AGENTS FOR CHANGE

**ACRA** - Advisory Committee for Research Administration

<https://sites.google.com/andrew.cmu.edu/acra/pages>



Training/ Communicat



Pre Award



Compliance

Agreements



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# PILOT PROGRAM OVERVIEW

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# PILOT PROGRAM SELECTION

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## **Selective Process for Initial Pilot Participants**

- Strong ACRA Partners
- “Friendly” department heads for escalation
- Positive working relationships with faculty
- Pilots across schools
- Pilots across proposal types

# IMPLEMENTATION

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- Approached departmental RAs to gauge interest
- Spoke to Department Heads for agreement
- Attended faculty meeting to introduce new timeline and process
- Confirmed timeline in writing/shareable Google Doc with assignment emails
- Soft launch - Month 1
- Full implementation - Month 2
- Frequent reminder pings



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# PROGRAM ELEMENTS

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## TIMELINES

### **3 separate timelines:**

1. 5 business days - internal approvals
2. 48 hour (56 hour) - full draft proposal
3. Submission day - final proposal by 9:30am



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## **T-5 Days:**

*Internal approvals* – finalized budget, finalized budget justification, title, draft SOW, any approvals for cost sharing, subcontractor packages. Departments can customize and earlier deadline, such as 7 business days for department routing.

## **T-2 Days:**

*Full draft proposal* – all required components of the proposal identified in the solicitation to pass administrative review must be present by 9:30am 2 days prior to deadline.

## **T-0 Days:**

*Finalized Proposal* – all final documents loaded and proposal released to OSP for submission by 9:30am



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# PROGRAM ELEMENTS

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## ESCALATION PROCESS

Elevated Decision Maker (DH, ADH, Chair, etc) provides approval to continue on the proposal path if any of the deadlines are missed.

Must have the authority to say NO, if needed



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# PROGRAM ELEMENTS

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## ESCALATION PROCESS

- 5-day: approval needed by designated escalation approver
- 48 hour: approval needed by designated escalation approver
- Submission day: approval needed by designated escalation approver, Associate Director OSP, Associate VP Research



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# PROGRAM ELEMENTS

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## DETAILED COLLABORATION

- Minor Edits Made in the 48 hour window
- Communication of needed corrections
- Simultaneous review by both Research administrator and proposal analyst
- The Human Element



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# STATISTICS

College/Department	Fiscal Year	Proposal Count	Proposal Initiation *	Routed to Dept/College Approvers*	Received by OSP*
ECE: ELECTRICAL & COMPUTER ENGINEERING	2024	128	31.47	8.25	5.79
ECE: ELECTRICAL & COMPUTER ENGINEERING	2023	92	43.17	2.36	-8.83
CIT	FY21-24	2,026	76.44	-2.52	-10.33
ARCHITECTURE	2024	16	16.00	7.13	5.38
ARCHITECTURE	2023	7	62.14	-24.71	-26.00
CFA	FY21-24	61	71.69	-10.30	-15.18
DIETRICH	FY21-24	508	46.51	6.48	4.82
HEINZ	FY21-24	165	30.46	1.14	0.12
MCS	FY21-24	769	104.18	1.56	-16.04
OTHER	FY21-24	129	13.38	-22.40	-24.42
SCS	FY21-24	2,230	96.08	1.02	-0.49
TEPPER	FY21-24	46	11.39	3.09	3.02
CMU	FY21-24	5,934	81.65	-0.26	-6.04
			* Average Days Before Deadline		

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# SUCCESSSES / CHALLENGES

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# PROGRAM CHALLENGES

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## **HUGE** CULTURE CHANGE!

BUY IN - from RA teams,  
from stakeholders and  
department  
leadership/decision makers

COMMUNICATING THE  
IMPLEMENTATION

COMMUNICATION BETWEEN  
CENTRAL OFFICE AND  
DEPARTMENTS

WORKFLOW  
MANAGEMENT - moving  
from last in, first out to  
first in, first out



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# PROGRAM SUCCESSES

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## From Department Perspective - CIT/ECE



- REDUCED STRESS!
- Improved communication and relationship building
- Adequate time for corrections / better package out the door

- More advanced notice for intent to submit by faculty
- Increased accountability



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# PROGRAM SUCCESSES

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## From Department Perspective - College of Fine Arts/Architecture

- ❑ Arts grants are often unusual need more lead time to develop
- ❑ Sponsored projects team provides proposal development support in addition to research administration
  - Timeline for proposal development increased
  - Earlier access to proposal solicitation to assess any compliance issues and address unique situations
  - Greater collaboration between PI, sponsored projects team, and advancement
    - More frequent check-ins
    - Better quality proposal: consistent between all parts of the proposal and adequate time to edit and make corrections
    - Improved communication between dept and OSP analyst



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# PROGRAM SUCCESSES

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## FROM CENTRAL OFFICE PERSPECTIVE

- Improved quality control (consistency and thorough review)
- Reduction of Emergency Situations (minimize crises and more predictable timeline avoids reactive work environment)
- Enhanced Compliance (regulatory adherence and reduced risks because time to mitigate)
- Effective Resource Management (time management and workload)
- Streamlined Coordination allows for improved communication and standardization
- Increased success rates credited to higher quality and prevention of last minute errors
- Training and Development Opportunities (central office can identify common issues across all proposals and the timeline enables opportunity for constructive feedback)



# PLANS FOR EXPANSION And REPLICATION

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# FUTURE PLANS

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Pilot has expanded to 4/7 schools, multiple departments within schools;  
continued expansion

Expand institution-wide July 2025

Create a “P”olicy

Analyze impact on the retention of RAs

Switch inventory management process



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# QUESTIONS and COMMENTS

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*Thank You!*

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