



SOCIETY OF
RESEARCH
ADMINISTRATORS
INTERNATIONAL



The Future of Research Administration

Society of Research Administration International
Annual Meeting
October 29, 2024

Where will we be in 2034?



Objectives

One

Provide background on the evolution of research and research administration.

Two

Deliver strategy and operations requirements that will need to be acquired across the preaward, postaward, and compliance spectrum.

Three

Describe trends that will form the emerging potential state of research.

Four

Review the priorities that should be of the highest emphasis today.

Today's Agenda

1. Top Trends in Academic Research

2. Strategy and Operations Requirements

3. Other Emerging Trends

4. Objectives to Emphasize Today

Top Trends in Academic Research



Government funding will continue to decline as a percentage of research portfolios, and nonfederal funding (e.g., industry sponsored) will make up larger portions of research budgets.



Mid-sized to smaller research programs will have to become more specialized as research Centers of Excellence.



Interdisciplinary research (e.g., ARPA-H) will experience significant growth.



Big data will finally fulfill its promise and potential, facilitated by advancements in scalable AI.



Research partnerships and networks will continue to grow.

The Impacts to Research Administration

	Trend	Impact
	Government funding will continue to decline as a percentage of portfolio, and nonfederal funding (e.g., industry sponsored) will make up larger portions of research budgets.	Research administration staff will become more adept at research contracting as speed to contract will become a valued key performance indicator (KPI).
	Smaller research programs will have to become more specialized as research Centers of Excellence.	There will be fewer specialized and dedicated resources to support the research enterprise, with the potential for continued shared service center models.
	Interdisciplinary research (e.g., ARPA-H) will experience significant growth.	Projects will become larger with more collaborators and greater complexity, requiring more time, effort, and specialized knowledge to manage the administrative support.

The Impacts to Research Administration *(continued)*

	Trend	Impact
	Big data will finally fulfill its promise and potential.	Data warehouses, etc. introduce complicating factors and increased regulatory risk (e.g., research security), compounded by compliance issues (and opportunities) arising from ML and AI.
	Research partnerships and networks will continue to grow.	Processes and procedures must be streamlined and reconciled between partnering entities.

Three-Tiered Reality in SOM-based Research

The landscape of research funding and institutional priorities has shifted giving rise to a three-tiered reality in SOM-based research with implications on research administration.

	Tier 1 – NIH top 25-30	Tier 2 – NIH top 30-75	Tier 3 – Outside NIH top 75
Typical Profile Description	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Abundant access to extramural funding Resource intensive basic, clinical, and translational programs Fewer limitations on type of research pursued and research support infrastructure 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> More limited funding; highly focused scientific endeavors Typically, higher reliance on industry funding Tailored programs to meet local and regional needs Program-specific infrastructure investment to maximize impact 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Minimal extramural funding Struggle to meaningfully invest in research programming beyond UME/GME requirements Non-resource-intensive (e.g., clinical trials, population health) focus Limited research infrastructure
Research Administration Implication	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Careful evaluation of the cost/benefit of tier 1 Emphasis on financial sustainability/accountability Need to demonstrate a clear ROI of research administration 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Concentrated resources in areas of high-performance and impact Emphasis on partnerships to support strategic priorities Outcomes-driven investment models 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Clear emphasis on partnerships or outsourcing to support research models Potential to explore affiliations with external research institutes

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Research Administration Requirements

Strategy

1. Recruiting and retaining the best talent in hybrid and remote models
2. Aligning research administration to institutional strategy
3. Enhancing integration activities for research administration offices
4. Investing in analytics and data processing capabilities

Operations

1. Integrated IT platforms
2. Compliance for real-time data access
3. Enhanced KPIs and increased efficiency
4. Integrated training

▶ **Research organizations must consider the new strategy and operations requirements and the related rationale to prepare them for the future.**

Research Administration Requirements: Strategy

Requirement

Rationale



1. Recruiting and retaining the best talent in hybrid and remote models

- The research industry continues to feel the post-pandemic impact, with many offices being understaffed and many professionals working in hybrid and remote environments.
- Team development, employee engagement, and compensation studies will become vital to maintaining the workforce, especially as research administrators experience increased workloads compared to pre-pandemic levels.



2. Aligning research administration to institutional strategy

- Research entities are complex organizations with several layers. Planning is done at the health system, university, school/college, institute, and department/function levels.
- Without having an integrated approach to including infrastructure as an enabling strategy, discordance is often the result, and achieving goals across all entities is likely to falter.
- Professionals must reconcile growing the research enterprise under resource constraints.

Research Administration Requirements: Strategy

(continued)

Requirement

Rationale



3. Enhancing integration activities for research administration offices

M&A activity rebounded back to pre-pandemic levels in Q2 2023. Partnerships, affiliations, and mergers and acquisitions (M&A) are expected to continue at a robust pace through the coming years in both the nonprofit and for-profit sectors, including across higher education and healthcare.



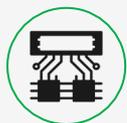
4. Investing in analytics and data processing capabilities

- Research administration tools are very transactional, with limited analytical functions.
- Key capabilities, such as cognitive science, artificial intelligence (AI), robotic process automation, and data protection, are driving major investments to optimize team efficiency and scale programs.
- Technological advances are also impacting staffing mix and recruitment of professionals in the field.

Research Administration Requirements: Operations

Requirement

Rationale



1. Integrated IT platforms

- An integrated IT platform is composed of a set of integration software products that enable users to develop, secure, and govern integration flows and enable rapid API creation and lifestyle management to ensure that various integration requirements are met.¹
- Integrated IT platforms enable streamlined business operations, increase the efficiency of data management, reduce costs, and improve customer experience.
- Increased global collaboration, multiple affiliations, and the establishment of clinical research networks require controls to support the transfer or centralization of data.



2. Compliance with real-time data access

- Compliance issues continue to increase, particularly in cybersecurity, ransomware preparedness, telehealth and remote patient monitoring, research fraud, and IT systems and data integration (including clinical trials), laboratory safety, and export controls.
- Compliance-monitoring efficacy is further limited by labor shortages, advancements in AI, and the lack of investment in research administration.
- At the same time, AI will be a tool to be leveraged in research compliance.

Research Administration Requirements: Operations *(continued)*

Requirement

Rationale



3. Enhanced KPIs and increased efficiency

- Operating with rigor across preaward, postaward, and compliance is often challenging without clear and standardized performance targets.
- Regarding proposals, trials, industry contracts, and accounting, there are many areas where progress may be measured through KPIs, with a target of continuous improvement.



4. Integrated training

- For AMCs or primarily teaching facilities, the research function is often siloed from the clinical and education missions, resulting in fewer resources dedicated to training.
- Research administration training is often not included in mandatory compliance training programs.
- Integrated training should be manifested in education plans for researchers and administrators, and there should be a gauge on how it is being achieved.

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Emerging Trends Impacting Research Administration



M&A Activity and Research Enterprise Consolidation



Outsourcing Research



Convergence of Workforce Pressures



Team Science



24/7/365 Service Model



Clinical Research



The New Generation of AI



Research Security



Shared Resources and Equipment



Trend One: M&A Activity and Research Enterprise Consolidation

Emerging Trend

Rapid market concentration and the consolidation of hospitals and health systems continues to increase nationally through M&A activity. The number of public and private two- and four-year colleges continues to decline through either closures or mergers. Standalone research institutes are exploring strategic partners.

Impacts

- Research administration needs to be at the table for due diligence and integration planning.
- Generally, requires a reconciliation of research operating procedures.
- Leads to a consolidation of research infrastructure and support functions (e.g., IRBs) but opportunities to supplement resources.
- May require retention tactics to mitigate flight risk (e.g., compensation, bonuses, other fringe benefits); may limit state-based institutions in what they can provide.
- Requires aligned policies and procedures to maintain operational efficiency and minimize compliance risk.
- Strategically growing research across new sites may increase regulatory risk without protective measures.



Trend Two: Convergence of Workforce Pressures

Emerging Trend

The pandemic rapidly accelerated telecommuting and the trend has remained sticky with 90% of employees working in a hybrid or remote environment and of those, 19% fully remote in 2023.¹ While optimized remote and hybrid models increase employee productivity, in 2023, 41% of employees reported daily stress, a figure that remains elevated above pre-pandemic levels.²

Impacts

- Hiring managers must compete with other companies offering flexible working arrangements for the same talent pool.
- There is an increased need to determine what the company's culture looks like and how to maintain it—remotely.
- Leadership must be creative in how it manages and delivers results without in-person interaction.
- Compensation packages will need to become more competitive as organizations pursue the same talent as entities outside their region.
- Many research programs will remain on site/campus, and those researchers expect a level of in-person engagement.
- Managers must contend with providing proactive support to their employees while balancing performance expectations from higher up.
- Developing new methods for professional development, training, and career paths for promotion and growth tailored to this new hybrid work reality will be critical to retaining top talent and curbing higher turnover rates.

¹ 2024 Cayuse State of Research Administration Benchmark Report.

² [State of the Global Workplace Report - Gallup](#)



Trend Three: 24/7/365 Service Model

Emerging Trend

With remote work, outsourcing, and advancing technology removing barriers around normal business hours for research operations, a continuous coverage model for research support and round-the-clock monitoring is becoming more commonplace.

Impacts

- In the preaward phase, tools and processes need to be regulated precisely to manage proposals, trials, and industry contracts on an ongoing basis.
- This is the greatest challenge compared to the postaward (traditional and clinical trial accounting) and compliance (human and animal) phases.
- Developing the appropriate staffing structure and coverage is a key success factor.
- At the same time, AI/ML and other technologies will accelerate automation of routine tasks. Less task-based work may allow for more cross-training and generalist career paths, enabling employees to support a broader range of internal customers with an ability to provide a wider breadth of personalized services.
- When possible, shifting to a self-service model for simple requests and tasks will alleviate administrative burden and simultaneously improve user experience.
- Wearable technology creates opportunities to collect real-world evidence continuously, advancing research but increasing data risk.



Trend Four: The New Generation of AI

Emerging Trend

By 2030, nearly 30% of hours currently worked across the US economy could be automated.¹ ML, AI, and NLP applications have become increasingly common in research settings. Researchers are using large public and private data sets to advance their research programs and improve clinical decision-making. In addition, ML and AI are also being deployed across industries to monitor compliance and facilitate contracting. Foundation models, which are flexible, reusable models trained on large datasets, will likely drive greater adoption of AI capabilities across industries.

Impacts

- These tools can analyze data objectively and remove subjectivity introduced through human assessment processes, allowing for the automation of rote and formulaic aspects of research administration (e.g., compliance monitoring, contracting) and the development of strategic research administration models focused on efficiency, compliance, and research growth.
- NLP may assist in recruitment for clinical trials. When applied to clinical documentation, NLP can recognize and extract relevant information, automating much of the enrollment work that research teams (e.g., coordinators) typically have had to do.
- The right data, integration methods, personnel, and risk mitigation strategies must be in place and periodic language processing rules reviews must be conducted to optimize ML and AI. Interconnected technology/systems and agility/adaptability of processes will be critical to maximizing real time data reporting and ML/AI functionality.
- The skill sets for research administrators and associated training will migrate from transactional to increased critical analyses/problem solving.

¹ McKinsey.



Trend Five: Shared Resources and Equipment

Emerging Trend

Many research organizations are strategically investing in specialized resources and equipment, but with a focus on efficiency. More thorough financial reviews are leading to a shift toward the improved sharing of these resources. Developing a comprehensive inventory and appropriate pricing analyses will be key to a more efficient use of both resources and equipment.

Impacts

- A pricing analysis needs to be done not solely on cost accounting, but also based on a market review to optimize internal volumes.
- Billing and budgeting structures need to consistently built and monitored.
- It is key to identify the appropriate owner(s) of costs and operations, whether they are in central research administration or departments.
- Entities will enhance the marketing of these services to external vendors at cost+ rates to offset operating losses, while monitoring usage and ensuring access to internal researchers.



Trend Six: Outsourcing Research

Emerging Trend

Outsourcing is an efficient method for organizations to bring in outside expertise. Increasing global connectivity, combined with the pandemic, has only accelerated this trend with many consulting firms now providing outsourcing for research administration activities. Centralized research hubs are an emerging model internationally, but they are less common in the US.

Impacts

- Benefits include maximizing output utilizing the existing infrastructure and reducing the inefficiency of using a variety of disparate entities to conduct research (or building the necessary framework all internally).
- Administrators may benefit from a leaner cost structure gained through outsourcing in this era of ever-downward financial pressures on the academic enterprise.
- Current vendors are also facing staffing challenges so it is important to monitor vendor performance against service level agreements. There could be a trend to move back to insourcing if performance continues to fall short.



Trend Seven: Team Science

Emerging Trend

A shift toward emphasizing team science and collaboration results in increased complications from an administrative standpoint that need to be managed. Cross-functional research can lead to more complex projects—and breakthroughs—but it needs to be structured appropriately. The situation becomes more intricate when considering how faculty practice plan structure impacts research, with organizational design dictating “who” owns research.

Impacts

- There is a continued push to share services for research administration using a first-in first-out approach, breaking down silos.
- Facilities may need to colocate to support interdisciplinary research, but large-scale shifts in the research footprint should be detailed in the research facility master plan.
- Core research administration will allow for improved efficiency of and logistics for cross-functional research.
- Global research programs require research administrators to learn local regulations, assess financial risks, ensure all materials are translated accurately into local dialects, and expand service hours to serve international teams.
- Research administration can bridge collaborative research efforts, but corporate governance and organizational structures will still need to be accounted for.
- Ensuring deliberate succession planning and distributed knowledge sharing across research administration leadership will safeguard seamless leadership transitions and continued success as research administration models evolve.



Trend Eight: Clinical Research

Emerging Trend

There is greater investment in health systems, AMCs, and community hospitals to build clinical research as a market differentiator in clinical care. In addition, market consolidation has increased the number of potential participants within larger systems, but few of these organizations have capitalized on extending trials beyond a single investigator or site.

Impacts

- With multiple affiliations and increased consolidation through M&A, organizations must clarify the level of engagement and ownership of research and align their clinical and research efforts.
- Administration will need to determine the appropriate level of support (i.e., research coordinators) for the efficient use of resources.
- Teleconsent and e-consent now make it easier to sign up participants, expanding trials across locations/markets.
- Research administration must stay abreast of regulatory changes impacting the clinical research life cycle, including, but not limited to, protocol deviation tracking, Serious Adverse Events, and billing.



Trend Nine: Research Security

Emerging Trend

Congress and the executive branch have taken several actions to increase research security while maintaining the benefits of an open research ecosystem. Research institutions receiving more than \$50 million in federal science and engineering support per year must establish and operate research security programs. Draft standards for research security have received significant comments and concerns over administrative burden and costs of compliance.

Impacts

- Proposed guidance contemplates highly centralized review and decision-making processes or equivalent controls in decentralized models, which may be a shift to the academic business model.
- Increased costs and associated administrative burden will be particularly difficult for emerging research institutions and those without mature compliance structures, while potentially increasing departmental costs through institutional funds flow for RCM based organizations.
- Enhanced risk and compliance processes must facilitate responsible international engagements, while promoting the free and open exchange of information that is vital to the process of scientific inquiry.
- Multidisciplinary research security teams must be agile in their response to federal guidance and requirements.
- Overall, ensuring data integrity and security will become increasingly complex and likely require significant incremental investment of time, resources, and process redesign to ensure compliance with evolving regulatory standards.

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Determining Growth Areas

Creating alignment within the organization and making the right plans to chart its course



Developing a Value Proposition

Thinking purposefully to prepare justifications for eminent and emerging investments



Upskilling the Workforce

Providing the workforce with new skills and abilities to meet the new demands of research



Designing an Organizational Model

Exploring how individuals and units should be arranged to maximize effectiveness

Questions & Discussion



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