Catalyst Quarterly

BY THE SOCIETY OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATORS INTERNATIONAL

Offering the latest updates, member experiences and achievements, and expert perspectives in research management and administration.

JULY 2026

VOLUME 02 | ISSUE 02

IN THIS ISSUE.

LEARNING AS WE GO: RETHINKING RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION TRAINING

FIND YOUR PEOPLE: A NEW PEER GROUP FOR AI IN RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION

IS THIS GOING TO BE ON THE TEST? THE TRAINING OF NEW INVESTIGATORS

SRAI | SOCIETY OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATORS INTERNATIONAL

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COUNTRIES REPRESENTED	INSTITUTIONS WORLDWIDE	YEARS OF EXCELLENCE

Empowering research administrators globally with the knowledge, resources, and community needed to excel, collaborate, and drive impactful research.

ABOUT SRAI

The Society of Research Administrators International (SRAI) empowers research administrators with professional development, networking, and resources to enhance their expertise and drive impactful research.

This magazine was prepared and designed by SRAI.
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Catalyst Quarterly

VOLUME 02 | ISSUE 02 | JULY 2026

Introduction

The Society of Research Administrators International proudly presents the *Catalyst Quarterly*: a specially recurring magazine edition of our digital newsletter, *Catalyst*. This publication features timely new content alongside standout pieces from the past quarter, offering the latest updates, member experiences and achievements, and expert perspectives in research management and administration.

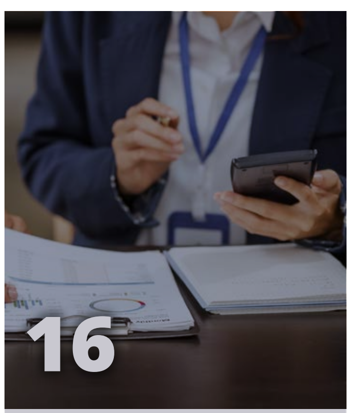
With each issue, we strive to advance SRAI's mission to empower research administrators with the knowledge, resources, and community needed to excel, collaborate, and drive impactful research worldwide. We encouirage our global community to always continue innovating—driving excellence and discovery, together.

SRAI | SOCIETY OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATORS INTERNATIONAL

Table of Contents

Training doesn't have to mean stepping away from the work—it can happen within it. By embedding learning into everyday tasks, research administrators can build skills, strengthen compliance, and improve efficiency without adding burden.

> In this group, we laser in on a single question: how are research administrators implementing and building with AI in reality?



> Training new PIs in grants management works best when it combines policy, applicability, and real-world scenarios.

The Latest from the *Catalyst*

06 **EDITOR'S NOTE**
by Farida Lada

08 **MEET THE EDITORIAL TEAM**

10 **LEARNING AS WE GO: RETHINKING RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION TRAINING**
by Lesley Jenkins

14 **FIND YOUR PEOPLE: A NEW PEER GROUP FOR AI IN RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION**
by James Shelley

16 **IS THIS GOING TO BE ON THE TEST? THE TRAINING OF NEW INVESTIGATORS**
by Cecilia Canadas

21 **TRAINING WITH PURPOSE: REIMAGINING A CAREER IN RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION**
by Kimberly Pratt, MA, CRA, & Shana McClelland, CRA

24 **WHEN THE RESEARCH ADMINISTRATOR BECOMES THE DATA SCIENTIST: THE CASE FOR HYBRID ROLES IN RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION**
by Happiness Eric Aigbogun

28 FROM FUNDING TRAUMA TO THRIVING: HOW ONE INVESTIGATOR PIVOTED TO SERVICE CONTRACTS FOR CAPACITY BUILDING
by Kimberly Read PhD, MBA, CRA

33 BUILDING CONFIDENCE IN RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION THROUGH TRACC AND SRAI TRAINING
by Samiyah Moultrie-Bailey, Eric Barrett, Carl Benjamin, Maria Benloula, & Terria Brown

QUARTERLY HIGHLIGHTS

Breaking New Ground

Every one in a while, it takes some out of the box thinking to discover a new perspective: A bad hand can be a new opportunity; An unexpected career change can be an open door. The articles in this section examine the ways in which research administrators old and new can arm themselves with knowledge, rethink processes, and confront the future, together.

“Moving into research administration from non traditional backgrounds can be a smart and rewarding path for everyone involved.

“Using this type of mindset, small resolutions can help you overcome the tendency to be reactive [...] This leads to stronger accountability.

36 A MIDCAREER PIVOT INTO RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION: LESSONS FROM STARTUP ENVIRONMENTS & RETHINKING PROFESSIONAL PATHWAYS
by Shazia Yaqub

40 NIH CLINICAL TRIAL REFORMS AND THE EVOLVING RESEARCH TRANSPARENCY LANDSCAPE
by Thomas Salazar

44 WHY COMMUNITY MATTERS MORE THAN EVER FOR EARLY-CAREER RESEARCH ADMINISTRATORS
by Crina Gandila, MS, CRA, CFRA

49 PRESCRIBED BURNS, NOT WILDFIRES: TRANSFORMING PORTFOLIO MANAGEMENT FROM REACTIVE TO STRATEGIC
by Stefanie Keto

Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

Information is an incredibly powerful resource. In any profession, keeping pace with the speed of change is crucial—and in our field, perhaps even indispensable. Nevertheless, the real, measurable impact lies in how that knowledge is applied.

Research administrators must ensure that their teams and institutions can adequately comply with the latest regulatory updates, follow recommended best practices, and decipher the latest technological developments; all while successfully navigating the complex technical, ethical, and financial considerations that inevitably follow.

In this issue of *Catalyst Quarterly*, we seek to uncover what that actually means in practice. From practical advice on new investigator onboarding and faculty training, to the practicable ways in which professionals can thrive and grow while balancing endless to-do lists. Articles in this edition highlight real-world experiences of those who implement and oversee these initiatives, the students and budding professionals who benefit from them, and the resources available to those who just need to know where to look.

As always, a big thank you to the *Catalyst* editorial board for their continued efforts to refine and amplify the voices of research administrators around the globe. As Editor, seeing this publication continue to flourish and grow has been an exhilarating experience, and one that I do not take for granted. We are grateful for the continued interest and support from this community, evident by the striking (and welcome!) increase in average submissions. In the last few months alone, our submission inbox has been practically engulfed by your stories, ideas, and invaluable observations—thank you for trusting us with them.

Finally, for those who have something to say but hesitate to take the next step, I invite you to share your unique perspectives with the *Catalyst*, so that we can continue to be a resource, reprieve, and sounding board for the field of research administration. For more details on how to get in touch with us, visit srai.org/catalyst/submit. Thank you for reading!

Farida Lada
Editor, *Catalyst*

Farida Lada, PhD, MBA

Chief Campus Compliance Officer
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Farida previously served as Associate University Provost for Research Administration and Compliance at the City University of New York (CUNY). Farida was also the Founding Academic Director of the Master's and Advanced Certificate Programs in Research Administration and Compliance programs at CUNY School of Professional Studies. Prior to that, Farida was the Director of Research Compliance at Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar. Farida has a PhD in Governance and Policy Analysis and an MBA.

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Jose brings extensive experience in higher education, research administration, and research development and has been a long time member of SRAI.

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Kimberly has 35 years of experience in business, finance, and research administration. She has extensive professional writing and copyediting experience, which she is excited to bring to the *Catalyst.* She has been an SRAI member since 2010.

Grant Management & Financial Oversight


Linda Dement, CRA

Grant and Finance Program Manager, Benaroya Research Institute at Virginia Mason

With 29 years in grants management and 15+ years in research administration, Linda uses her accounting degree to provide grant and fiscal management to her department at BRI. As a long-standing member of SRAI, she volunteers in various ways to support the SRAI community.

Tamara Ginter, CFRA

Director of Finance, College of STEM, Eastern Washington University

Tamara has over 20 years of higher education experience. In her current role, she oversees all college budgets, including post award activities for sponsored projects. She received her CFRA in 2024. She has been a member of SRAI since 2023 and has been a co-editor of the *Catalyst* since 2025.


Career Growth & Leadership

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Olumide sources research funding opportunities, reviews research funding applications and obtains internal approvals. He serves as a mentor for SRAI's Odyssey Program and is passionate about generating new knowledge in research management.

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Kimberly brings more than 15 years of expertise in research development and administration. She currently directs the Research Development Office at Ohio University, where she supports faculty in securing competitive funding and advancing the institution's research strategy.

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Operations & Workflow Management

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With 35 years of experience in research administration, Mark has served on the SRAI *Catalyst* Committee for the past six years. He is President for the SRAI Western Section.

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Anita oversees the Research Services portfolio, including federal institutional programs, capacity building, research development, and faculty engagement. Passionate about advancing the field, she serves on multiple SRAI committees, has published work in Catalyst and the Journal of Research Administration, and an SRAI Future of the Field honoree.

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Priya is responsible for implementing strategic recommendations to enhance research collaborations between Princeton University and thePrinceton Plasma Physics Laboratory (PPPL). She manage the PU/PPPL joint appointment programs, and serve as an administrative point of contact for research collaborations between the University and the Lab.

The Latest from the *Catalyst*

OPERATIONS & WORKFLOW MANAGEMENT

Learning as We Go: Rethinking Research Administration Training

By Lesley Jenkins

Training doesn't have to mean stepping away from the work—it can happen within it. By embedding learning into everyday tasks, research administrators can build skills, strengthen compliance, and improve efficiency without adding burden. Small, intentional shifts can transform how teams learn, collaborate, and deliver lasting impact.

When our days are filled with deadlines, compliance issues, and complex problems that require our constant attention, professional development is often the first thing that gets pushed aside. We all know how essential it is, yet it can easily fall to the bottom of our never-ending to-do lists. Rather than asking how and when we will find time for training when there is barely enough time to meet daily demands, perhaps the better question may be how we can integrate it more seamlessly into the work we already do.

Instead of approaching training as a dedicated activity, it may be more effective to embed learning within the natural rhythm of operations, increasing team efficiency and reducing errors. This approach can be applied across the full grant lifecycle, from proposal development to closeout, empowering research administrators to navigate both routine tasks and more complex situations with confidence and ease.

So how do we deliver meaningful training while balancing time and productivity constraints? One guiding principle we have adopted is to "work smarter, not harder." In practice, that means building training directly into daily activities in ways that are simple, sustainable, and aligned with the work already underway. Here are some examples that show how your teams can apply this approach in practical ways:

Embedded, Hands-On Learning

Real-time task-based training is one way to embed learning into daily work. As part of an internal team refresher, we scheduled time for a grants manager to walk through a payroll reallocation. Each staff member, both new and experienced, was assigned two allocations to complete: one alongside the trainer and one independently during the same session with guidance, as needed. By the end of the hour, seven payroll reallocations had been completed, and three staff members strengthened their skills. The session was recorded and archived, and AI tools were used to generate a step-by-step job aid, which included frequently asked questions. In a single effort, the team completed work, documented a process, and transferred knowledge effectively. This resource is now available for current staff as reference and can support training for incoming grants managers.

Task-Based Training

Full-day training programs, which often involve the delivery of a lot of information at once, can be overwhelming. Breaking training into brief, task-based or themed sessions provides administrators timely, relevant guidance when they need it most. These focused sessions facilitate quick review of processes, clarify team expectations, and reduce errors and rework. To support this approach, I maintain a running list of challenges, process changes, common errors, and recurring questions, and address one or two topics during our regularly scheduled team meeting. By dedicating just fifteen minutes in each meeting, we create space for questions, reinforce learning, discuss challenges, and identify opportunities to optimize workflows.

Enabling Critical Conversations

Real-time, collaborative learning can also create space for difficult but necessary conversations that support strong research administration, both within the office and across research teams. Integrating focused discussions gives post-award staff opportunity to resolve issues identified during grant reviews, develop strategies to address concerns, and determine when escalation is needed. This approach can also be extended to meetings with principal investigators, providing teams an opportunity to identify risks, provide feedback, and align on next steps. Over time, these conversations strengthen grant management, while improving relationships, accountability, and communication.

Learning Through Examples

Capturing lessons learned and examples of successfully executed tasks creates a valuable repository of institutional knowledge. When these examples include context, impact, and suggestions for future improvement, they can strengthen compliance, support consistent decision-making, and increase researcher satisfaction. This practice also gives teams an opportunity to celebrate quick wins, learn from mistakes, and better understand not only how tasks are completed, but ***why*** they matter. Maintaining this information centrally provides quick access to tools and resources for future reference and to support ongoing improvement.

Supporting Different Learning Styles

Our team has also developed flexible, accessible resources to support different learning styles, including scribes, annotated notes, process flowcharts, and recorded demonstrations. Because many of these are created during routine task completion, they require minimal additional time while preserving useful guidance for future reference. Shared consistently, these resources become a powerful and sustainable training tool.

In my experience leading within research administration, I have learned that effective training cannot rely solely on traditional methods or a one-size-fits-all approach. It requires intentionality, patience, and a structural commitment from the Office of Research to support the diverse learning styles and professional development needs of staff. When we shift the question from "How do I make time for training?" to "How can I rethink my training approach?", we open the door to the development of creative, flexible, and practical solutions.

Training is not just a scheduled activity; it is integral to how we work, communicate, and grow professionally. Intentionally embedding learning into everyday work shifts team culture from one focused solely on output to one grounded in continuous improvement. These methods have helped my team reduce rework, thereby decreasing task completion time by an average of 3 days over a 6-month period. By reimagining how we acquire and share knowledge, we can create lasting impact across our research communities.

AI Statement

Microsoft Copilot was used to support editing and refinement of this article. Assistance included improving clarity, grammar, tone, and overall flow of the writing. All ideas, concepts, and content are the original work of the author.

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SRAI

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Dr. Anna Quider
Government Relations Liaison
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our chance to ask questions, share insights, and join the conversation on emerging challenges in our field.

FOLLOW THE PULSE

SRAI SOCIETY OF RESEARCH ADMINISTRATORS INTERNATIONAL

COMMUNITY & MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Find Your People: A New Peer Group for AI in Research Administration

By James Shelley

Research administrators everywhere are building with AI. This peer group is where we compare notes on what we're actually implementing: not position papers or roadmaps, but workflows running live in the wild. If you're building in this space, come find your people.

All around the world, research administrators are building with AI. They are prototyping, experimenting, and testing the waters of what is possible. They are working within constraints, sometimes working around them, and sometimes figuring out creative ways to circumvent old barriers using new tools.

In collaboration with SRAI, I am starting a peer networking group to help surface how AI is intersecting with research administration in real-time. The idea is simple: a group for research administrators to share what they are building, learning, and exploring with AI in our profession.

The landscape is shifting fast. Some administrators experiment with AI off the sides of their desks. Some institutions are spinning up new internal workflows. Meanwhile, big incumbent, third party platforms and publishers race to integrate AI into their offerings. And a whole new generation of AI start-ups vie to get a foot in the door of the enterprise research market. Simultaneously, universities and research institutions must navigate new questions about privacy, ethics, security, and data sovereignty. At the same time, public skepticism raises real and critical concerns about the consequences of AI on copyright, employment, education, democracy, equality, mental health and the environment.

To me, all this suggests that we need an accessible, open platform to share information between us.

As a research administrator, I see the potential for AI to reshape aspects of our profession, across the entire research lifecycle. For example, I built an internal AI platform that can provide applicants feedback on draft grant applications (based on historical human peer reviewer critiques)[1]. I have deployed a web app that automates scholarly communication[2] for every research department in a whole faculty (building on ORCID and AI to create full newsletters and podcasts). Every week, I talk to PIs who are integrating AI into their grant writing[3], research programs, and scientific workflows.

But I also *constantly* hear from other administrators about *unique* initiatives in *other* institutions. So, this is a group for us to learn from one another as we build.

I am excited to better understand what people are actually doing with AI in other institutions. The research sector is awash in AI position papers, opinion pieces, guidance, policies, and roadmaps. In this group, we laser in on a single question: how are research administrators *implementing and building with AI in reality?* This isn't about AI literacy or awareness it's about the workflows and applications that are actually running live in the wild. This is all about paying attention at the rate of experimentation and adoption itself.

So far, the group brings together hundreds of research administrators and research-support professionals from roughly 185 institutions in ten countries across four continents. Membership cuts across universities, colleges, hospital systems, independent research institutes, and government.

What will AI change? What is it already changing? What will our work look like into the future? Every sector is facing these questions today, and research administration is no different. If you are building or experimenting in this space, this is an invitation to come "find your people" and compare notes with others across international and institutional contexts.

Get Involved

To join the group, sign up at https://convene.narratory.com/c/research-admin-builders-group

We meet on Zoom every two months, on the last Tuesday of the month. Meetings are organized democratically: Members submit questions, challenges, and projects they want to showcase, and the group up-votes the submissions that shape each agenda.

UPCOMING DATES:

- Tuesday, August 25, 2026 at 12:00 PM EDT
- Tuesday, October 27, 2026 at 12:00 PM EDT
- Tuesday, January 26, 2027 at 12:00 PM EST
- Tuesday, March 23, 2027 at 12:00 PM EDT
- Tuesday, May 25, 2027 at 12:00 PM EDT

AUTHORED BY:

James Shelley
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[1] https://www.uwo.ca/research/support/resources/automated-grant-feedback.html

[2] https://collate.narratory.com/

[3] https://www.uwo.ca/research/support/resources/ai-grant-writing.html

GRANT DEVELOPMENT & STRATEGY

Is this Going to be on the Test? The Training of New Investigators

By Cecilia Canadas

Success in the research enterprise depends on understanding the systems that support it. New faculty investigators often face a steep learning curve and an onslaught of information, rather than a thoughtful, measured learning experience. So, what do junior investigators *actually* need to know to navigate administrative processes effectively? When should those lessons be introduced, and what role can research administrators play in helping faculty build a foundation for long-term advancement?

Many institutions have established strong training programs for new faculty investigators on the workings of research administration, grants management, and serving as a principal investigator. However, many of these initiatives have the limitation that too much information is provided to the junior investigator too soon, thereby diluting the effect. In my pre-award world, I find the most effective strategy for onboarding new faculty to the world of sponsored research administration is a more measured approach, slowly releasing information so that it has time to sink in and be absorbed. Training new PIs in grants management works best when it combines policy, applicability, and real-world scenarios.

Training new investigators is not just about grant writing or sharing technical expertise. It is about sharing the art and craft of grantsmanship, of compliance, and of people management. Submitting a proposal is not rocket science (even if you are a rocket scientist). However, if it was easy, everyone would be doing it. If it were too challenging, young investigators would not choose this as a career. Like the metaphor of the three bears, it has to be "just right."

> "There is a saying, "Teaching systems thinking early is often more valuable than teaching more science." I cannot teach them science, but I can teach them how to navigate administrative considerations and how to optimize these processes to thrive as developing researchers."

I consider a strong PI onboarding and training program to be individualized to the faculty's needs. I usually begin by meeting with the new faculty members 1:1 and asking them to describe their research. I find that faculty *love* chatting about the workings of their science. This also provides a bonding moment for us. Following, I want to learn their future research vision and agenda. Do they plan to create an empire or a small cottage lab? Do they have unique research needs? Do they plan to work solo or in interdisciplinary teams? What is realistic? This is intended to really help them build a research strategy for their early years.

Once we have that set, our next goal is to identify funding opportunities. Does the new investigator have a track record of funding? Have they ever submitted a proposal before? We review the "how-to" of identifying funding. In my units, research administrators do not identify funding opportunities for faculty nor handle research development. However, faculty need to learn how to identify opportunities that are right for them. My job is to help educate them and guide them. Following the adage, I am not providing the fish for them; I am teaching them how to fish.

Next comes the proposal development phase, which is where their faculty mentor may come in. As a research administrator, however, my responsibility is to ensure they understand all the administrative pieces of a grant, including budget development and justification. This involves sharing samples of similar funding mechanisms, walking through the budgetary requirements, and teaching them how to align costs with actual research lab needs. I find most new investigators have no idea how expensive personnel costs are! Handling funding requests is an iterative process between us, with the faculty leading, albeit with the research administrator in their corner as a coach. This relationship continues and does not end when their first proposal is submitted.

Compliance and ethics are key aspects of a successful new investigator's training. Human subjects and IRB, animal research and IACUC, biosafety, and data privacy and security are all essential elements that touch research administration but are more integral to the lab or project's research functions. As a research administrator, I help guide the faculty on the administrative aspects of these areas, educating them on how they relate to the project's integrity. Yet, I don't want the faculty to learn that it's not their responsibility to handle these items; they need to truly understand the importance of compliance. They cannot shift these responsibilities to a staff member. Compliance and personal responsibility go hand in hand with a successful research project.

In the hand-off to the post-award team, it is key for the faculty to learn accounting 101. They need to understand the basics of accounting, such as knowing how to read a spreadsheet, understanding indirect costs and overhead, learning how to read burn sheets, understanding the procurement processes, effort reporting, and the intricacies of managing subawards. Financial staff are hired to maintain research accounting functions. However, I see my responsibility as a research administrator as teaching new faculty how to read and interpret data related to pre-award budgeting, while keeping in mind that I will eventually hand over their training to the post-award team.

In addition, to a certain extent, my role involves helping navigate the institution's policies. How does one work with the institution's sponsored programs offices? What are the internal policies? How do you navigate conflicting policies? This is an ongoing process. I find it best to teach the faculty to ask questions first, rather than make assumptions or take action that may have unintended downstream consequences.

Overall, I find that first-time investigators struggle most with underestimating the administrative workload and with going on instinct rather than critically thinking through issues. This comes out in the proposal development phase, where it is important for the faculty to flesh out the scientific aspects of the proposal, while the research administrator needs to ensure that the faculty considers aligning the aims with the more realistic budgetary aspects of the work. There is a saying, "Teaching systems thinking early is often more valuable than teaching more science." I cannot teach them science, but I can teach them how to navigate administrative considerations and how to optimize these processes to thrive as developing researchers.

In the end, if I can help a faculty appreciate my role, understand the importance of processes, partner with me on deadlines, and come to me with questions, I have succeeded in my role as their guide into a successful future career as a faculty member.

AUTHORED BY:

Cecilia Canadas
Pre-Award Research Administrator
UCLA

TRANSFORMING TEAMS EMPOWERING INDIVIDUALS

Two formats, one standard of excellence. SRAI training programs provide consistent knowledge, practical tools, and lasting results.

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CAREER GROWTH & LEADERSHIP

Training with Purpose: Reimagining a Career in Research Administration

By Kimberly Pratt, MA, CRA, & Shana McClelland, CRA

In this interview, Kimberly Pratt speaks with Shana McClelland, formerly the Director of Research Administration and Compliance Training at the University of Arizona, about what training can look like in a field that is always changing. Shana talks about how her interest in learning and storytelling led her to move from a traditional research administration role into leading a department responsible for training both researchers and research administrators. Over time, she learned that training isn't just about meeting requirements, it can help people grow a little more confident in what they do.

Kimberly: To kick us off, tell us about your former role as Director of Research Administration and Compliance Training. It appears it was structured more broadly than similar positions elsewhere. How did that come to be?

Shana: Yes, historically, those roles have been very compliance-centered, check-the-box training, maybe a video on research security or conflicts of interest, or how to work within institutional systems. When I stepped into the role, I knew I wanted to take a more holistic approach.

Compliance still mattered, and we continued working closely with offices like Responsible Outside Interests and research security, but I also wanted to focus on research administration as a profession. We started sharing resources from SRAI and similar organizations, held monthly development meetings, and looked for more ways to connect with staff through outreach and collaboration with the staff council. During a particularly difficult hiring stretch last year, we added résumé and cover letter workshops, along with some informal career coaching. Over time, it became less about "required training" and more about supporting people's professional growth.

Kimberly: That's a significant shift from hands-on research administration. Where did your interest in training and development come from?

Shana: Honestly, from frustration. Research administration doesn't have much in the way of organized, formalized training, especially beyond the basics. At one point, I realized that if I wanted clearer, more useful professional development, I was going to have to help build it. Looking back, my whole life kind of led here as a lifelong learner. Even when I attend trainings that seem unrelated, I usually walk away with something that changes how I think or work.

One of the first examples I can think of was a universal design workshop I attended at the University of Arizona. The main takeaway stuck with me—when something is designed well from the start, it works for almost everyone without requiring accommodations. This idea changed how I thought about accessibility, and over time, it influenced how I approached developing software, processes and eventually training.

Kimberly: How did that influence how you teach adult learners?

Shana: Later, I attended a "train the trainer" workshop for professionals who weren't formally educated as teachers. Combined with universal design, it really shifted my thinking. I started paying attention to cognitive load, visibility, storytelling, and engagement. Early on, my slides were basically my brain on a page with too much text. I didn't read them aloud, but they were overwhelming. I learned adult learners connect through real experiences.

Just as importantly, I've also learned to pause, to ask questions and let participants do the talking. One thing that stuck with me is that the person doing the talking is the person doing the learning, so I try to shift learning back to the audience.

Kimberly: You've also talked a lot about critical thinking in research administration.

Shana: Yes. Right before I left Arizona, I put together a new monthly discussion forum focused on logic, analysis, and critical thinking. I kept hearing that the job felt like it was all about checklists and that concerned me. We're not there to just check off tasks or enforce the rules; we're supposed to help guide faculty as they make decisions. That means really working to understand the intent and context and what's really being asked, and what it may impact down the line. What happens at pre-award doesn't stay there. Those decisions affect post-award, and vice versa.

Kimberly: In your experience, what makes research administrators well-suited to move into training roles?

Shana: It's their credibility and perspective. Doing the operational work gives you real-world insight, and curiosity is the single biggest skill. Curiosity about other viewpoints – the PI's, the sponsored projects office's, the sponsor's – and how they intersect. Over time, you start to see how everything connects. Teaching has a way of forcing you to really understand what you're doing. It makes you slow down, avoid assumptions, and give people room to learn by trying things themselves. At the same time, it helps to have some support along the way. For a while, we leaned on instructional designers and adult learning specialists to guide us. On our team, subject matter experts worked side by side with instructional designers, and we picked up a lot from each other. It just worked.

Kimberly: Do you have any advice for research administrators considering this path in the future?

Shana: Build a range of skills as you go. Spend some time learning about adult learning. How to lead a session, how to tell if something is working, and how to use the tools that go along with it – those kinds of things. At the same time, don't overlook the experience you already have. That day-to-day operational work really does matter and sometimes you forget that. Careers in research administration don't usually follow a straight line anyway. They tend to twist and turn depending on the opportunities in front of you. Stay curious, try new things, and be willing to adjust as you go. It feels like this kind of training work is getting closer to being recognized as its own path. I'm looking forward to us getting there.

Shana's experience shows that training doesn't have to be about ticking off requirements. It can be about helping people stay curious, connect, and think a little more deeply about what they do. Taking this approach will eventually make the research enterprise stronger and more resilient overall.

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GRANT MANAGEMENT & FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT

When the Research Administrator Becomes the Data Scientist: The Case for Hybrid Roles in Research Administration

By Happiness Eric Aigbogun

Research administrators are quietly doing the work of data scientists, building systems, automating workflows, and wrangling complex datasets, without formal recognition or training. This article explores the growing gap between what RA roles demand and how the field prepares people to meet those demands.

The Job Description Didn't Mention Python

The job description sounds simple enough: generate reports, monitor grant finances, and oversee procurement operations. After a few months in the position, you discover yourself attempting to address a procedure that requires an excessive amount of time or emails. Soon, you are developing a form, automating a process, or identifying a technical solution that was not included in the initial job description. You were not instructed to do that. You weren't trained to do it. Nevertheless, you do it since it resolves the issue. It's funny how that occurs.

This has been me, or should I say, this is me. So, if any of this sounds familiar, you are probably not alone. There has been a quiet shift happening across research institutions. Research administrators are increasingly taking on work that looks a lot like data science and, surprisingly, doing it well, despite little to no formal recognition that the profession itself is evolving. I first noticed this shift when my colleague and I spent an afternoon writing a script to automate a task that had previously taken hours of manual tracking. Nobody asked me to do it. It wasn't in my job description. But it solved a problem and made the process more efficient.

Looking back, I can think of several other times when I ended up building a solution that wasn't really part of my job. At first, I thought I was simply finding ways to make my own work easier. The more I talked to colleagues, though, the more I realized many of us were doing the same thing. The title says administrator, but some days the work feels a lot closer to data analyst, systems builder, or process designer.

What Data Science Looks Like in the Day-to-Day Task of an RA

Walk into any busy research office or lab today and take a closer look at what administrators are actually

> "Here is the tension: while the work has evolved, the systems around it largely have not."

doing. Many of us are managing messy datasets pulled from multiple systems, creating dashboards to track grant spending, building digital forms, automating approval processes, and maintaining documentation for compliance and audit purposes.

One example that stands out to me was creating a tracking system for orders that had been placed but not yet received. At the time, I was simply trying to make it easier to keep track of outstanding orders and know when to follow up with suppliers. What started as a quick solution eventually became a much more efficient way to monitor orders, identify delays, and reduce the amount of manual checking involved.

And from conversations with colleagues, I know this isn't unique to me. Similar stories keep coming up. Administrators are finding ways to improve processes, reduce manual work, and make research operations run more smoothly, even when those tasks fall outside the traditional view of the role.

These tasks may not sound groundbreaking, but they play an important role in keeping research operations running efficiently. A well-designed digital procurement process is faster, easier to track, and less prone to human error than one that relies on long email chains and paper forms. Likewise, a live budget tracker that pulls current data and flags potential issues gives a Principal Investigator far more visibility than a spreadsheet reviewed every few weeks.

To me, this is what data fluency looks like in research administration. It is not just about working with data. It is about collecting, organizing, automating, and communicating information in ways that help people make better decisions and work more effectively. Whether or not it appears in the job description, these skills are already becoming part of the day-to-day reality of the role.

The Gap: Job Descriptions Haven't Caught Up

Here is the tension: while the work has evolved, the systems around it largely have not.

Most research administrator job postings still center on compliance knowledge, grants management experience, communication skills, and familiarity with institutional systems. These remain important. But they describe a version of the role that is increasingly incomplete. The administrator who can only manage a process is less effective than the one who can also improve it, and improving it today almost always involves some degree of technical fluency.

The result is a gap between what the role truly requires and what institutions prepare people to do. Data skills are not rewarded, taught, or acknowledged in assessments of performance when they are not included in descriptions of positions. These skills are learned informally by administrators through self-study, necessity, and sheer perseverance. As a result, there is a significant and expanding discrepancy between institutional training and the actual demands inherent to the profession.

This gap falls unevenly. Administrators who already have technical backgrounds, or who have access to additional training, can navigate it. Those who do not are left to figure it out on the margins of an already demanding job. That is not a sustainable or equitable way to build a profession.

Living in the Hybrid: A Firsthand Perspective

I came into my role as a Research Project Assistant with a background in computer science and experience in bioinformatics. At the same time, I enrolled in a Master of Data Science program, taking courses in responsible data science, visualization, and computational methods, not as a detour from my work, but because the skills overlapped directly with what the job was asking of me.

What I did not expect was how immediate and continuous that overlap would be.

The concepts I was studying in the classroom, data documentation, workflow automation, ethical data use, reproducibility, were things I was applying in the lab the same week. When I needed to build a system to manage ordering and project tracking, I drew on what I was learning about application design and data modeling. When I was asked to communicate research timelines and resource needs, visualization principles from my coursework shaped how I approached it. When I thought about how to document lab processes so they could be maintained by whoever comes next, I was thinking about responsible data practice as much as standard operating procedure.

At first, I thought this overlap was specific to my background and interests. But the longer I worked in the role, the more I realized it reflected a broader shift in research administration. I suspect many of you have experienced some version of the same thing.

What the Research Administration Field Could Do About It

Recognizing this shift is one thing. Figuring out how to respond to it is the next challenge. From what I have seen, many research administrators are already working with data, improving processes, and building systems to make their teams more efficient. The challenge is that these skills are not always reflected in job descriptions, training programs, or performance evaluations. In many cases, people are learning them on their own because the work requires it.

From my experience, these skills are already becoming part of the job. The question is how the field can better support and recognize them. Data fluency should not be viewed as something reserved for technical or senior roles. As research administration continues to evolve, understanding how to work with data, improve workflows, and use technology effectively is becoming valuable at every level.

I also believe SRAI and other RA professional organizations are well-positioned to help move this conversation forward. Through conference sessions, workshops, and professional development opportunities, these organizations can help administrators build skills that many of us are already developing through trial and error. There may even be opportunities to formally recognize these competencies through certificates or other learning pathways.

Beyond training, there is a broader conversation about recognition. As institutions continue to modernize their research operations, administrators who understand both the process and the data bring significant value to their teams. That value should be reflected not only in the skills we encourage people to develop, but also in how these roles are defined and supported as career paths.

The Hybrid Role Is Already Here

Looking back, I don't think there was a single moment when this shift happened. It wasn't announced, and it didn't come with a new title or a formal change in responsibilities. Instead, the technical work gradually became part of the job.

Today, many research administrators are not only managing processes and supporting compliance requirements, but also building systems, working with data, and improving the tools that research teams rely on every day. The role has evolved, even if the way we define and recognize it hasn't fully caught up yet.

The more I reflect on my own experience, the more I believe this shift is already underway. Research administrators across institutions are taking on responsibilities that require both administrative expertise and technical skills, often without those expectations being formally acknowledged.

As the profession continues to evolve, I believe it is worth asking how we can better support and recognize these emerging skill sets. My hope is that this conversation encourages us to think more intentionally about how we define, support, and recognize the evolving role of research administrators.

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GRANT DEVELOPMENT & STRATEGY

From Funding Trauma to Thriving: How One Investigator Pivoted to Service Contracts for Capacity Building

By Kimberly Read PhD, MBA, CRA

A program director shares her experience with the sudden loss of funding that nearly ended their program. They had to completely rethink their approach to funding and building long-term capacity. Service and consulting contracts offer a practical, revenue-generating path forward, helping faculty diversify funding and sustain programs.

Over the last couple of years, our research portfolio has been contracting, a far too common situation for many institutions right now. The sudden cease-and-desist orders, the claw-back of funding due to shifts in priorities, and the contraction of funding opportunities are significantly impacting the fluidity and productivity of research programs.

Pam Hardy-Jones, the Program Director of the Just-In-Time Training Network, shared a nearly program-ending event they experienced.

> ***"A traumatizing event happened to us about three years ago. We lost a 15-year-old contract with the State of Florida where we were the one-stop shop for all child welfare, as well as systems and programs that touch child welfare. Our contract went away... What were we going to do? How were people going to access what we were providing? We really didn't have an answer... We knew that we were going to have to grow again to sustain."***

The services offered by Pam's program, then known as Florida's Child Welfare Program, had previously been available on a website. When that website was pulled down, Pam and her staff "were inundated with phone calls, emails, and contacts asking what happened." This was an eye-opening experience for that team. "We knew we had a valuable service that we were providing, and that was something that people wanted and needed." Pam and the Child Welfare team began to build a sustainable service. The team found there are four key components to making service contracts work to maintain and grow their program. Pam shares her thoughts on each from her experience:

Know Your Value

> *"We knew our training, specifically our training with caregivers, for foster parents, relatives, was very valuable… so one of the first things that we did was we locked down. We had previously had an open website where we provided all this training and services to folks, and we realized that that wasn't going to work if we were going to sustain. So, we had to lock ourselves down… We moved everything into a learning management system, instead of out there in the open on a website.*

> *"Part of knowing our value was also to evaluate the competition and figure out what was being done around the country for training. What are people charging? Where are they located? What is the gap that we can fill? We wanted a quality product for people that they will pay for."*

Find Your Audience

> *"We developed a pricing structure because we knew that when we were looking for our audience, we might not get contracts with states. We may have to go after smaller agencies and counties versus states. So, we figured out who we could go after, and we worked really hard at coming up with a listserv. We went state by state, looking at who in that state might be a good contact for us, what agencies were in that state, what agencies maybe spanned across multiple states that might make a bigger impact, and ask us for our services."*

Market Strategically

> *Pam and her team felt it was important to rebrand their program, so they became the Just-In-Time Training Network. "We developed marketing materials, flyers that advertise*

what we did. We had over 200 trainings that were available for caregivers and professionals in the field … We started going to conferences, talking to people, explaining what we do, and then just engaging. And then, little by little, we started getting inquiries here and there, from small agencies."

Plan for Growth and Sustainability

"The first year, we got three small agencies. Very small… That's where we started. And then this last year, we continued to do the marketing. We continued to do the conferences, and then just recently, in the last two or three months, we've brought on three additional agencies—one agency that spans across multiple states… Those are much larger.

"We keep up with them, we track them, and the first three have just renewed. They are coming back for a second year. So now our goal is to add another two or three this next year, whether they're small or big… We continue our marketing strategy, continuing to look at what we're producing to make sure it meets the need."

During this program realignment, Pam and her team discovered an interesting wrinkle in developing short-term service contracts as sponsored contracts. "A sponsored contract wasn't going to be feasible for them. It was cost-prohibitive." This initially became a barrier. Sponsored projects have funding restrictions, financial reporting and auditing requirements, and facilities and administrative fees.

However, revenue-generating operations through institutional business activity agreements can provide an alternative funding vehicle. These activity agreements align with auxiliary accounts that are set up for multiple streams of revenue within a defined purpose. These accounts are intended for faculty and staff to generate their own revenue from non-recurring activities. The activities must support the mission of the university, college, and department. Generally, the contract mechanism for these revenue streams is a simple memorandum of understanding (MOU) or a purchase order (PO).

What approach should you suggest your faculty take? First and foremost, what are your institution's policies and procedures? The first question we ask is whether the contract requires the institution's legally authorized signatory to execute it. If yes, then regardless of duration or dollar amount, the contract must proceed as a sponsored proposal. Beyond that, the path of a sponsored project or an auxiliary project is purpose-driven. If the faculty member is looking to justify a study, focus on potential, demonstrate feasibility, outline the broader impacts, or address methodology, the sponsored project route is best. However, an auxiliary path is acceptable for legally binding agreements that limit liability, define the scope of work, have well-defined duties, detail deliverables, and terms of payment.

As I previously mentioned, service contracts tied to an auxiliary are generally MOUs or POs, and as such, they are much simpler than the behemoth research contracts and notices of awards that we are used to seeing. In academia and research, we've learned to write in a particular style that is passive, generalized, and verbose. You want to avoid this academic speak in a service or consulting contract. Nix that formal tone and be direct. Here are a few tips:

- **Use Precise Verbiage:** Simple and direct words, such as start instead of commencing
- **Legalese:** Contracts do need a few legal terms, such as indemnification, liability, penalty, etc.
- **Be Specific:** Use names instead of titles, avoid jargon, include dates, and detail responsibilities
- **Use Short Sentences:** Avoid complex structures, break down compounds

- **Use Active Voice:** Nix those passive phrases such as, "This analysis will determine ..." Instead, say, "I will analyze ..."
- **Be Detailed:** Define the terms, describe the full product, and be clear about the purpose
- **Remember Your Reader:** You are not justifying your work; you are legally binding an agreement

As with writing style, budgeting for a service contract differs from that for a formal proposal. With a research proposal, you have to develop a detailed budget and justification to make your argument to a funding agency for the allocation of each budget line. Not so with a contract. In its simplest form, you are stating that you will provide a specific deliverable for a specified amount of money: For $5,000, I will provide a series of five webinars. For $150 per hour, I will code your qualitative dataset. The key is to determine how much to charge for a specific deliverable to keep your program solvent and to facilitate growth.

The handy budget templates that we use for proposal development can be a great tool because they can help you pull together details that you might otherwise miss. Your hourly rate may be $76, but don't forget the fringe. Do you need assistance from other staff? You probably aren't going to include the cost of sending you and your team to a conference, but do you have local travel mileage costs? And, while there are no F&A fees for these types of contracts, don't forget the overhead rate associated with the auxiliary. Each institution charges a percentage of revenue.

Do these types of revenue generation sound intriguing? They should! The Just-In-Time Training Network now has a healthy, unrestricted balance available to support its program. Pam's team has had a great deal of success, and she offers, "The biggest thing that I would say is that I think everybody has a value in their work, and there are ways that you can market yourself, whether it's through evaluation or whatever you're working on, and creating materials and getting them out there. I think it has been very valuable for us."

What do your principal investigators do within their routine work that has value? What is their expertise that can be developed into contract work? The options are limitless: consulting, short-term training, literature reviews, technical and scientific research reports, analysis, database development, speaking, web design, and so much more. Help them explore their value and develop new approaches for supporting their goals and the broader mission of public service.

I would like to thank Pam Hardy-Jones and Lisa Coy with the Just-In-Time Training Network, and Maricel Hernandez and Janet Reyes, members of my team, for their contributions to the training webinar, "I Can Charge for That?! Service and Consulting Contracts," and to this subsequent publication. Pam reviewed this article and approved the use of her quotes, which were extracted from the webinar transcripts.

AI Statement

Grammarly AI was used to catch and correct any grammatical errors.

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GRANT DEVELOPMENT & STRATEGY

Building Confidence in Research Administration Through TRACC and SRAI Training

By Samiyah Moultrie-Bailey , Eric Barrett, Carl Benjamin Maria Benloula, & Terria Brown

The Tufts Research Administration and Compliance Cohort (TRACC) program, an NSF-funded initiative, investigated the feasibility of building a sustainable workforce pipeline from community colleges to research institutions. Cohorts reflect on how the program's use of SRAI's structured training curriculum helped to demystify research administration, support diverse learners, and create a strong foundation for careers in grants, compliance, and sponsored research.

As the research enterprise continues to expand, the need for skilled research administration and compliance professionals continues to grow. The Tufts Research Administration and Compliance Cohort (TRACC) program, which is made possible through grant OIA 2414119 from the National Science Foundation (NSF) under the GRANTED initiative, addresses this need by creating an apprenticeship-style pathway for community college students through paid training and mentored internships. TRACC is led by Tufts University's Office of the Vice Provost for Research in partnership with Bunker Hill Community College, and is designed to expand access, increase workforce diversity, and strengthen the future pipeline of research administration professionals.

As TRACC cohorts, we entered the Society of Research Administrators International's (SRAI) "Basics of Research Administration" intensive training program from a wide range of backgrounds, but with little experience, stepping into a field that initially felt vast, complex, and entirely new. Like Eric Barrett, many of us had begun with a feeling of "stepping into a new professional world," working to understand the interconnected responsibilities of grants, compliance, budgeting, and post-award management. The course structure, however, which included real-world examples and weekly opportunities to learn from experienced professionals, made the material feel more approachable and helped the bigger picture come together. At the same time, we understood that feeling overwhelmed is often part of learning this profession. For example, our colleague, Carl Benjamin, who entered the program with no prior experience, found the breadth of federal funding agencies and mechanisms particularly challenging. As we moved through the modules together, the course's iterative design—encountering core concepts multiple times in different formats—gradually reduced the steepness of the learning curve. What felt confusing at the beginning became clearer through repetition, discussion, and shared problem-solving.

The experience was a rewarding collaborative effort, with each cohort member bringing unique strengths and perspectives to the learning process. Drawing on her background in law and management, Maria Ben Loula found that the SRAI course helped her connect regulatory frameworks to the practical realities of IRB, IACUC, and post-award operations. The recorded sessions and PowerPoint presentations also became valuable shared resources, giving us the flexibility to revisit and reinforce key concepts at our own pace.

We also found that practical learning strategies (such as note cards, repeated listening, and the instructors' great sense of humor!) helped make the content more relatable and memorable. Like many of us, Terria Brown noted that mastering the new vocabulary, acronyms, and federal guidelines required "determination and creativity." These strategies not only supported our learning in the SRAI intensive but also strengthened our understanding of the TRACC curriculum and, in Terria's case, contributed to her work on a national PCORI project.

We especially appreciated the course's institution's agnostic approach. Because the material was not tied to any single university, we were all able to connect our newfound knowledge with the policies and procedures at Tufts and partner organizations. Access to recordings and course materials has become a lasting resource for many of us, supporting both immediate learning and serving as a future reference.

As a group, we discovered that what began as a daunting introduction to a complex field became manageable through structure, repetition, and community. Each of us found a strategy that worked: Eric grounded himself in the bigger picture; Carl watched concepts coalesce; Maria connected legal frameworks to practice; Terria built confidence through repetition; and Samiyah benefited from the clarity of institution-agnostic instruction. As each of us found our own path, we also learned alongside and from one another.

In conclusion, both the TRACC program and the embedded SRAI training have been beneficial in helping us build confidence and find our place in research administration. TRACC provided the pathway, community, and applied learning environment that introduced us to the field, while the SRAI course helped demystify its complex ecosystem. Together, they transformed an initial steep learning curve into a more navigable path. Across our experiences, the importance of accessible resources, structured yet flexible learning, and the context needed to connect policy and regulation to daily practice continues to resonate.

As we move forward in our careers, we take with us not just a certificate, but a shared understanding of one foundational principle: in this field, like any other, growth is continuous, context matters, and the best answers often begin with, "Let's look it up together."

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Breaking New Ground | PAST HIGHLIGHTS

GRANT MANAGEMENT & FINANCIAL OVERSIGHT

A Midcareer Pivot into Research Administration: Lessons from Startup Environments & Rethinking Professional Pathways

By Shazia Yaqub

The world of entrepreneurship is fast-paced and unpredictable. In some ways, professionals in startups must be just as adaptable as the average research administrator. And yet, some might raise an eyebrow at those transitioning into research administration from non-traditional backgrounds. However, the versatile nature of our profession is a strength we should embrace. There is no one set path to success.

Research administration is often seen as a highly technical field, one you can only master after years spent working in sponsored programs offices or university departments. But that's not the whole story. Moving into research administration from non traditional backgrounds can be a smart and rewarding path for everyone involved. These career pivots can expand capacity, strengthen teams, and leverage transferable skills.

This piece shares my own journey into research administration after nearly 20 years working in startups and nonprofits in Pakistan. My experience shows that these transitions aren't just possible, they can bring real value, both to individuals and to the field as a whole.

A Steep Learning Curve: Entering Research Administration in a New Country

In 2025, I joined Southern Methodist University as a departmental grant management specialist, new to the United States' research administration. I brought strong operational experience from marketing and related roles but limited grant exposure. I anticipated a steep learning curve and focused on building fluency quickly.

Research administration is a technical, knowledge-intensive field requiring fluency in evolving regulations, compliance, and institutional systems. My natural curiosity predisposed me to a keenness for learning. My ramp-up focused on reviewing federal regulations, sponsor guidance, and institutional policies, as well as shadowing experienced administrators. I established routine training and Q&A with supervisors and maintained references for key processes and best practices.

Despite strong training, priorities in research administration shift quickly. The field requires ongoing recalibration. I stay updated through higher education news, listservs, sponsor blogs, and connecting with communities like SRAI, which also connect me with mentors and peers to share concerns.

Discovering Common Ground to Integrate

Gradually, I began to see research administration as a system rather than a set of disjointed tasks. Through discipline and repetition, I came to understand the moving parts and how they connect. The research enterprise felt like the operating system, and the lab looked familiar—a PI leading a small, mission-driven team, making decisions under constraints, and steering work toward measurable outcomes. In that sense, research labs often operate much like startups, and Principal Investigators (PIs) like founders. For example,

- PIs build research agendas; founders set product vision and strategy.
- Labs run on grants; startups run on runway—both require constant resource triage.

- Students and staff are the operating team for the PI; early employees are the operating team for the startup. Both are constantly building capacity to shape outcomes, constantly hiring, team building, and enabling teams to produce output.
- Sponsors expect compliance and deliverables; investors expect governance and milestones. As prime investors, they both want evidence of discovery and progress.
- Leadership and labs need to be constantly vigilant of risks and make decisions under uncertainty. For PIs and research administrators, it is about managing risk through IRB review, compliance considerations, and effort validation; whereas for entrepreneurs, it is about managing marketing, legal, and product risks. [1]

Of course, there are still differences; startup culture (and many PI's research plans!) rewards speed and experimentation, while research administration values defensibility, documentation, and audit readiness. My takeaway was not to replace one mindset with the other, but to combine them by bringing agility to early problem-solving and precision to each grant "project."

Turning Parallels into Practice

Within the year, I transitioned to proactively building my own space within research administration. Breaking down complexity into clear steps, I built mental (and written) processes based on these parallels that made compliance easier, and proactively managed risk in service of the research mission.

1. **Financial Discipline = Proactive Budget Stewardship**

In startups, cash flow discipline relies on forecasting, scenario planning, and early course correction. That same discipline drives good grant oversight by monitoring award balances, flagging potential funding gaps, and helping PIs plan timely rebudgeting. In both settings, good research stewardship means preventing problems, not only responding to them. So, we are now working on opportunities for early interventions through improving grant cycle monitoring. I put my scenario planning experience to help with this.

2. **Systems Thinking = Designing the Grant Lifecycle Experience**

Working with early-stage startups, I learned to build operations systems from the ground up and create continuous improvement cycles. The same systems mindset applies throughout the grant lifecycle by mapping handoffs, strengthening investigator reporting, and monitoring early indicators that affect finance, compliance, and faculty activity. Eventually, the goal is to embed compliance and best practices into the process, not chase it afterward.

3. **Comfort with Ambiguity = Managing Regulatory Complexity**

Guidance changes and sponsor expectations shift so that uncertainty will remain a job. As research administrators, we must remain calm and collected. It signals that ambiguity and instability are opportunities to strategize. My approach is to identify what has changed, clarify assumptions and constraints, communicate the implications, and rebuild structure around the new requirements.

Rethinking Pathways into Research Administration

Today's research enterprise operates in a high-stakes, VUCA (volatile, uncertain, complex, and ambiguous) environment. In that context, research administration is not just paperwork; it is the work of turning uncertainty into accountable decision making so research can move forward steadily and responsibly, creating impact for the world, pushing the boundaries of cutting-edge research, and satisfying stakeholders.

As you can see, an entrepreneurial skillset translates well to research administration. My comfort with ambiguity, rapid learning, and disciplined prioritization are part of a successful research administrator's toolkit. Effective research administration also depends on understanding the history and purpose of sponsored research, for example, why the rules exist, how compliance evolved, and the public impact that research is meant to deliver—that is my growth goal.

While this is the specific skillset I bring to the table, for others entering the field, different cross-sector strengths can be just as valuable: project management, customer-service mindset, data literacy and reporting, change management, training and communication, process improvement, and equity-minded partnership with faculty and staff. The strongest career pivots come from those that combine these growth perspectives with sectoral expertise.

As the research ecosystem continues to grow, there is room and perhaps a real need for professionals who can learn quickly, build trust, and design clear systems that protect compliance while enabling discovery. This helps create an influx of ideas and maintain a healthy balance, fostering a growing and dynamic field of research administration.

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REGULATORY & COMPLIANCE OVERSIGHT

NIH Clinical Trial Reforms and the Evolving Research Transparency Landscape

By Thomas Salazar

The NIH recently reclassified BESH studies as non-clinical trials, reducing registration and reporting burdens, while simultaneously aligning its "intervention" definition with the 2018 Common Rule, expanding the scope of clinical trials. These conflicting decisions highlight the tension between administrative burden and research transparency amid growing expectations for research accountability.

After prolonged debate, in January of 2026, the NIH announced it would no longer classify basic experimental studies involving humans ("BESH") as meeting the definition of a "clinical trial," effectively reducing the scope of NIH-funded research subject to ClinicalTrials.gov registration and results reporting requirements. (NIH, January 2026). Three months later, the NIH harmonized its definition of an "intervention" with the 2018 Common Rule, broadening the types of research that meet NIH's definition of a "clinical trial." (NIH, March 2026).

These policy changes reflect conflicting priorities: in an era marked by declining public trust in the research enterprise, should advancing research transparency take precedence over reducing administrative burden?

The NIH established the definition of a "clinical trial" in 2014 to increase transparency and accountability in research (NIH, 2014). Since then, the definition has undergone multiple policy reinterpretations that have altered the scope of research subject to registration and reporting requirements. BESH research has been a long-standing issue, with the agency issuing multiple notices over the last eight years on whether such studies meet the definition of a "clinical trial" requiring registration and reporting. (NIH, 2018; NIH, 2025).

After May 25, 2026, NIH grant applications for BESH research will no longer be classified as a "clinical trial." (NIH, January 2026). While this decision reduces administrative burden by simplifying grant writing and reporting, it runs counter to modern expectations for research transparency by the global research community. Under the NIH Policy on Dissemination of NIH-Funded Clinical Trial Information, NIH-funded BESH research will no longer be required to register and report results. (NIH, 2016). However, many BESH studies still meet the International Committee of Medical Journal Editors (ICMJE) definition of a clinical trial, which requires prospective registration of eligible studies as a condition for publication in ICMJE-affiliated journals. (ICMJE, n.d.). Additionally, the World Medical Association's Declaration of Helsinki, revised in October 2024, mandates the registration of all research involving human subjects, including BESH. (WMA, 2024).

The NIH's recent harmonization with the 2018 Common Rule's definition of "intervention" introduces ambiguity to NIH's current approach to policymaking. Under the new definition of "intervention," which expands the scope to include both physical procedures for gathering information or biospecimens and manipulations of the subject or the subject's environment, more NIH-funded research is subject to registration and reporting requirements. (NIH, March 2026).

> Early planning for clinical trial registration and results reporting embeds compliance into the study lifecycle and provides a buffer to ensure all requirements are met in a timely manner.

This update aligns with recent efforts to standardize federal human subjects research requirements but seemingly runs counter to NIH's recent notice on BESH. Taken together, these changes signal conflicting priorities at the NIH, with reducing administrative burden and promoting research transparency concurrently shaping policy decisions.

Recent public health emergencies, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, have had a complex and lasting impact on public trust in the research enterprise, with misinformation often outpacing scientific communication. As a result, calls for greater transparency, timely data sharing, and clear communication with the public have intensified across the research community. One prominent example is the International Council for Harmonisation Good Clinical Practice (ICH-GCP) E6 Revision 3 update in January 2025, which introduced stronger expectations around transparency and public disclosure of trial results. (International Council for Harmonisation, 2025). As research transparency expectations continue to rise, the NIH must proactively adapt its policies and reporting frameworks to remain aligned with the evolving research enterprise landscape. Prioritizing research transparency over administrative burden in policymaking restores public trust, shifting the focus towards accountability and ethical research conduct. Notably, to maintain public trust, the NIH will need to remain clear and consistent in its messaging and policy implementation. Aligning with evolving research transparency expectations and consistent policy frameworks will foster meaningful discourse going forward.

Takeaway: How Can Institutions and Researchers Remain Compliant?

As clinical trial and transparency boundaries shift, institutions and researchers must remain compliant to secure and maintain government funding, adhere to ethical requirements, and prevent reputational harm. Institutions can support researchers by creating clear guidelines on clinical trial registration and results reporting through local policy. These guidelines should not be static; as the research transparency landscape evolves, the policy must evolve to ensure continued compliance.

Institutions should also provide tailored messaging and training to researchers as compliance expectations change. Institutional action alone will not be sufficient to maintain compliance; researchers must also foster a culture of compliance and accountability. Early planning for clinical trial registration and results reporting embeds compliance into the study lifecycle and provides a buffer to ensure all requirements are met in a timely manner. Researchers should also engage their institution's ClinicalTrials.gov administrators early in the study lifecycle to stay up to date on evolving requirements. Study teams would also benefit from developing standardized processes, such as internal SOPs and checklists, to reduce the risk of non-compliance. Ultimately, a coordinated effort among institutions and researchers is essential to maintain proactive alignment with evolving research transparency requirements.

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COMMUNITY & MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

Why Community Matters More Than Ever for Early-Career Research Administrators

By Crina Gandila, MS, CRA, CFRA

Remote and hybrid work can lead to increased isolation. Through mentorship, peer support, and community, research administrators can build confidence, strengthen their connections, and achieve long-term success in the field.

Research Administration is a rapidly changing habitat, which can be challenging for new professionals that are just getting their feet wet. Furthermore, while remote work might offer better work-life balance for some (Nagaprakash T. et al., 2024), it can lead to feelings of isolation and lack of institutional support among early-career research administrators. Professionals in this field, especially newcomers, can benefit from various tools and resources to build confidence, develop expertise, and create meaningful professional connections that support long-term career growth.

Most early-career research administrators enter the profession with limited experience and inadequate formal training. Navigating sponsor regulations and institutional policies while also supporting faculty and researchers can quickly become overwhelming. In today's remote or hybrid work environment, professional community has become more important than ever before.

For many new to the field, a sense of isolation can emerge quickly (Sahai S. et al., 2020), particularly in environments where they may be one of only a few administrators within a department or institution, working in a remote or hybrid setting. Unlike professions with clearly defined career pathways and standardized training, research administration often requires new hires to learn through hands-on experience while simultaneously juggling complex responsibilities, often with limited support, onboarding, or mentorship. Virtual work reduces spontaneous conversation and the informal learning moments that occur organically in shared office spaces (Kurland & Cooper, 2002), resulting in a negative self-perceived performance. Asking a quick question from across the hall, observing colleagues handle difficult situations, and building relationships through casual interactions are simply less accessible in virtual workplaces. As a result, early-career professionals may struggle to feel connected to their teams, institutions, or the profession itself.

New research administrators may also experience hesitation, in fear of making mistakes or appearing unprepared. In addition, navigating institutional culture can be a tricky endeavor, especially when processes, expectations, and communication styles are not always clearly explained. A strong peer network or a trusted mentor can decrease stress involved in decision making, supporting early-career professionals in feeling connected, informed, and empowered—in any type of working environment, but especially in remote work settings. Some institutions may choose to pair a with a seasoned colleague, someone who can maintain enough professional distance from the role and encourage a "no question is a dumb question" attitude. These types of support systems can help reduce feelings of isolation (Dussault & Barnett, 1996) and uncertainty. For research administrators at smaller institutions, accessing peer support through the Research Administration ListServ or mentorship programs within professional organizations (such

as SRAI's Odyssey or Author Fellowship programs) can provide insights that extend beyond policies and procedures, offering guidance on communication, professional growth, and navigating institutional culture. In those first few pivotal years, simply hearing that others have experienced similar doubts or challenges can provide meaningful reassurance and encouragement to budding professionals.

Moreover, attending conferences, webinars, networking events, and volunteer opportunities exposes professionals to new ideas, evolving regulations, and emerging best practices while helping build professional relationships. SRAI, NCURA, and many other professional societies across the globe offer numerous opportunities for professional engagement needed for success.

As an early-career research administrator, seek connections with peers not only within your institution, but also across the broader profession. Gaining exposure to experienced leaders, becoming familiar with diverse career pathways, and engaging in collaborative professional networks can be a source of inspiration to remain engaged in this field, and invest in a meaningful and sustainable career.

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OPERATIONS & WORKFLOW MANAGEMENT

Prescribed Burns, Not Wildfires: Transforming Portfolio Management from Reactive to Strategic

By Stefanie Keto

We've all been there, standing in front of the wildfire called work, wondering how to tackle it. Many research administrators stand before the fire of reactive accounting; but can you change worlds without burning down the house? Yes. It takes time, but you can plan for tomorrow's fire, today.

All over our community, we are referred to as firefighters. We move from one firefight to another, and this tends to be the norm for many research administrators (RAs). Is it possible to move from being completely reactive to proactively planning and forecasting for your portfolios? Yes! Is it going to happen overnight? No, it will take some planning and time. Once you reach the proactive and forecasting side, things will flow more smoothly. Don't get discouraged, you'll still have fires; they're inevitable in our world as RAs. Nevertheless, a proactive management style will help minimize the flames. They become more manageable—like prescribed burns in the forests, specifically designed to help prevent uncontrolled wildfires.

Just remember that learning to be proactive takes time.

The first step to being proactive is transparency with your principal investigators (PIs), which provides a good working relationship and reinforces the team mentality. Everyone appreciates transparency, even if it's not recognized right away. Some of my PIs used to tell me to "make the magic happen." In some cases, the PIs learned the why behind what RAs do—that we are there to help, not hinder. Yet, for some, it was still "magic." Through open communication, Ras can help their teams accomplish what they ask for and keep their research moving forward. Ultimately, transparency provides a way to understand and predict when things are going to have a significant impact on the project. This way, you won't be blindsided by an overpaid due to an incomplete separation, or the occurrence of unapproved travel. Currently, these are the daily fires present in the profession, but they can be reduced with communication and transparency.

The next step towards mastering proactivity is meeting with the PI; this is the key to success in managing their portfolio and fostering trust. In collaboration with the PI, specifics regarding these meetings should be discussed beforehand. Are these meetings to be monthly, quarterly, or every semester? Are these to be virtual or in-person? If needed, start this discussion with a brief email, or pop into their office for a quick chat to establish clear expectations. Then comes the actual meeting prep: ensure that you understand their portfolio, the PI's needs/wants, preferred communication style for both sides, and if there are any limitations or potential conflicts, e.g. travel or upcoming leave.

Next: make sure you understand their portfolio and the deliverables for each project. Have you asked about their specific research and their goals to better recognize their potential needs? It's vital to ensure completion of the deliverables and research while supporting their portfolio lifecycle. For example, what are their equipment or supply necessities? How many years or semesters of support does each student require? Getting a grasp of wants/needs can help lay the foundation for success, especially with future proposals. Plus, you get to learn more about their research, which I've personally always enjoyed; you never know what kind of innovative study you'll get to be a part of—not something easily replicated in your personal life. I remember when whispers of the "Internet of Things" filled the halls in one of my departments—now, it's here and living with us all daily.

And then, there's clean-up: a constant throughout the lifecycle, especially as a firefighter RA. Remember small steps (it's easier to feel rewarded with small wins!). Tidy up one grant/contract at a time, then move on to the PI's portfolios in kind. Forecasting is next. Aim small at first: anticipate the objective facts that will impact the next month, then the next two-to-six months, and so on and so forth if possible. An example that comes to mind: Once, I was asked to redistribute a researcher's salary from one project to several other projects. I paused to see how this request would affect the other projects receiving the expenses. In this case, four of the six projects were going to be negatively impacted, drawing them into a deficit. Additionally, two projects were closing two months later. This was the cycle of reactive accounting repeating itself. By redoing the math, I prevented four prospective fires I would have had to fight and extinguish later. Yes, it took more time in the moment, but it saved me from many a future headache. Using this type of mindset, small resolutions can help you overcome the tendency to be reactive, shifting your account management style to a more proactive model. This leads to stronger accountability for forecasting.

In our line of work, things are never stagnant. Once you adopt a proactive management style, the fires occur less frequently, and can be controlled or extinguished with ease. Being thoughtfully prepared means being able to better assist your PIs with their research, provide stronger support to their teams, and reduce stress.

Remember: small improvements, whether they're daily, weekly, or monthly, can lead to significant long-term change and create a more meaningful impact on everything that you do.

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A Final Note

As you turn to this last page, we hope the stories and insights inside have sparked new ideas and connections, leaving you inspired.

Research administration is a field built on collaboration. Your engagement, as well as your dedication to the profession, ensures we continue to grow stronger together.

Thank you for being part of our journey. Until next issue—keep building, keep connecting, and keep leading.

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