

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.

SEPTEMBER 2025

VOLUME 01 | ISSUE 02

The Importance of University Based Research and Why It Is Worth Saving | Why Are We Doing All of This? Why Does Research Matter?

Special Section: Artificial Intelligence in Research Administration: Ethics, Challenges, & Opportunities

Celebrating Research Administrator Day: Research Moves With Us

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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.

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Catalyst Quarterly

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Introduction

The Society of Research Administrators International proudly presents the *Catalyst Quarterly*—a special magazine edition of our 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, as we aim to uphold SRAI's mission to promote international best practices and support the growth of the research enterprise, the *Catalyst Quarterly* encourages our global community to collaborate, innovate, and continue advancing the quality of the academic and research environment worldwide.



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Editor's Note

Dear Readers,

Welcome to the 2nd volume of the *Catalyst Quarterly*, where we present to you a new selection of thought-provoking articles while revisiting some highlights from the past quarter. In this volume, our special section dedicated to the use of artificial intelligence (AI) in research administration covers topics ranging from basic uses to compliance implications. The sooner we discover how to use AI most effectively while ensuring we don't cross any boundaries, the better we will be able to use this new technology to our benefit.

And the timing couldn't be more fitting: September 25, 2025 marks National Research Administrator Day—a celebration of the important role research administrators play in sustaining the global research ecosystem, and driving new discoveries and innovations that will shape our collective future. This year, SRAI is honoring this day by highlighting the importance of research administrators everywhere who have learned to bend, pivot, adjust their stride, and manage increasingly complex realities with dexterity and poise (pages 30-31). In this constantly shifting research administration landscape, where new technologies using AI are contributing to this change, we must take this moment to recognize the sheer adaptability and resilience that defines our field. Research doesn't stand still. Neither do we.

As always, I thank all of our feature and copy editors for their hard work in bringing this edition to fruition. I also want to express my gratitude to everyone who has submitted articles for publication in this magazine. Your contributions are a great way to share knowledge with research administration professionals worldwide. Finally, I invite you, the reader, to share your stories, knowledge and expertise by writing for the *Catalyst*. (To learn more about how to submit, flip to page 46.)

Here's to the ever evolving, problem-solving power of research administrators!

Farida Lada

Meet the Editorial Team



Farida Lada, PhD, MBA

Editor

Chief Campus Compliance Officer, University of California San Francisco.

Farida previously served as Associate University Provost for Research Administration and Compliance at the City University of New York, and was Founding Academic Director of the MS Program in Research Administration and Compliance at the CUNY School of Professional Studies. Prior roles include Director of Research Compliance at Weill Cornell Medical College in Qatar.



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In her role, Crina serves as a central resource for managing grants and overseeing projects. Previously, she worked in public relations and marketing, and as a freelance copy editor and translator.



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Carly is located in the School of Medicine (SOM) Dean's Office, where she currently oversees the Core Services business operations, the lead data analyst for the SOM Office of Research, and manages the Louisiana Clinical and Translational Sciences Center (U54) program.

Career Growth & Leadership



Saiqa Anne Qureshi, PhD, MBA

Feature Editor

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Saiqa Anne has extensive experience across the life cycle of awards in Europe and the US, including in research ethics and integrity.



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Feature Editor

Research Support Specialist (Pre-award), University of Tasmania, Australia.

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



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Feature Editor

Associate Director of Contracts and Grants, North Carolina Agricultural and Technical State University.

Kimberly has over 23 years of higher education experience. She served on the *Journal of Research Administration* Board since 2015. She is also a Co-Chair for the Sponsors and Agencies Track.



Sheleza Mohamed, MBA, MHA, FACHE, CRA, CFRA, CPRA

Feature Editor

Sheleza is a Federal Grants SME with over 20 years of experience. Sheleza contributes to the field of research administration as a frequent national and international speaker and trainer. She is also an avid volunteer, leader, and writer for SRAI and NCURA.

Community & Member Engagement



Grant Development & Strategy

Jose G. Alcaine, PhD

Feature Editor

Director of Research Services and affiliate and adjunct faculty, Virginia Commonwealth University.

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



Kimberly Read, PhD

Feature Editor

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Grant Management & Financial Oversight



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Feature Editor

Director of Finance, College of STEM, Eastern Washington University.

Tamara previously worked for 17 years at the college level at Texas Tech University. In her current role, she oversees all college finances, including post award activities for grants and sponsored projects. She received her CFRA in 2024.

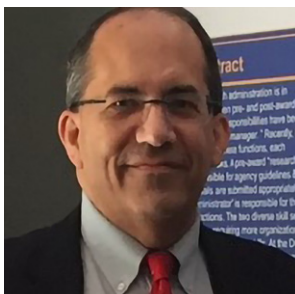


Betty Morgan

Feature Editor

Interim Director, NCSU College of Sciences Research Office.

Betty has over 20 years in the life-cycle management of the Research Administration profession. She has worked at UNC CH, Duke, and George Washington Universities.



Operations & Workflow Management

Mark Lucas, CRA

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With 35 years of experience in research administration, Mark has served on the SRAI Catalyst Committee for the past five years. He is President Elect for the SRAI Western Section and also serves as SRAI Distinguished Faculty.

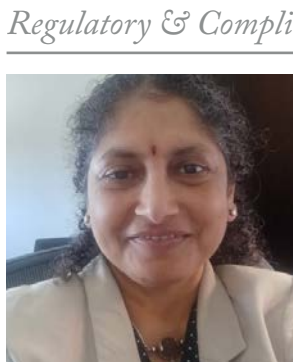


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Anita manages institutional programs, leading strategic planning and program development, researcher development, grant facilitation, and internal awards administration. Also an SRAI Future of the Field honoree, she is passionate about the progressive growth of the institutional research profile.

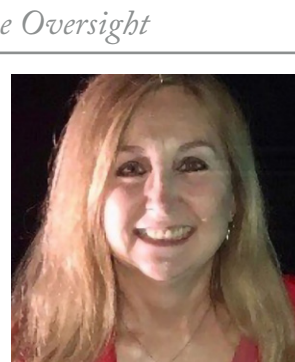


Rani Muthukrishnan, PhD

Feature Editor

Director of Research Compliance at Texas A&M University-San Antonio

In her role, Rani manages IACUC, IBC, IRB, export controls, research security, RCR, research integrity and more. She holds doctoral degrees in both Education and Ecology, and has been published in SRAI's *Journal of Research Administration* and *Catalyst*. She enjoys writing about best practices, challenges, and trends in the field.



Anita Trupiano, MS

Feature Editor

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In her role, Anita oversees NIH documents and regulatory activities. She holds a B.S. in Graphic Design from Farmingdale State College, SUNY, and a M.S. from Bridgeport University. Passionate about fostering community engagement, she regularly offers guidance to colleagues and aspiring professionals.

COMMUNITY & MEMBER ENGAGEMENT

The Importance of University-Based Research and Why It is Worth Saving

Part 1: Why Are We Doing All of This? Why Does Research Matter?

By Jose G. Alcaine, PhD, MBA, CRA, & Dara C. Little, MPA, CRA

Why does research—and research administration—matter? The truth is the world is better off because of federally funded, university-based research. We need to tell people about its benefits and positive outcomes, and why it is worth protecting. The public good depends on it.

Research administration and management is not for the faint of heart. In recent years, the work has become increasingly complex and unpredictable. Administrators grapple to support researchers with navigating changing regulations and policies, often in high-pressure institutional environments that are being challenged to prove their value and balance limited resources. It can take its toll and sometimes make us lose sight of why our work matters. At a time when administrators fear losing their job or feel overwhelmed by the demands, some are saying “I feel like quitting this job before the other shoe drops. This is too much stress. Why in the world should I put up with this? Why am I doing this at all?”

It may remind you of an old Monty Python skit where the characters ask, “What have the Romans ever done for us?” The skit goes on to say, “Ok, besides the aqueduct, sanitation, the roads, irrigation, medicine, education...what have the Romans ever done for us!” How quickly one forgets.

Or, is it possible they never really knew?

Telling the Story of University Based Research

We need to tell the story, which requires big, existential questions rooted in the mission of higher education, knowledge creation, and research—and why these things are a public good and how research administrators contribute in significant ways. The public good can literally mean the difference between life and death and (not to trivialize mortality) provide advances that make our lives easier. The decades-long partnership between the federal government and higher education has been an engine for innovation, workforce training, and economic strength.

A quick visit to the National Science Foundation (NSF) History Wall, reveals the many discoveries developed through the agency’s funding support of colleges and university-based projects “that may seem like science fiction today, but which the public will take for granted tomorrow.” Like the Monty Python skit, it’s easy to take for granted that federal funding to colleges led to discoveries that gave us the internet, better web browsers, 3d printing, the cell phone, robotics, self-driving cars, and pre-school educational TV programming, etc.—to name a few. These discoveries have had an immense impact on society and the world.

The Association of American Universities (AAU) states that university-based research matters because “It creates the foundation for major advances in such areas as health and medicine, communications, food, economics, energy, and national security. And it helps educate students to be scientific leaders and innovators.” This is not a trivial matter when a death is prevented by a life saving flu vaccine, or a statin drug that prevents a heart attack,



or another drug that treats opioid dependency, or insulin to treat diabetes, or yet another drug to control HIV. Transformative Nobel Prize winning, university based discoveries have saved millions of lives around the world, most recently culminating in the development of vaccine technologies to combat modern pandemics. We should not take these discoveries for granted.

This short article is the first in a series exploring the importance of university-based research, why it is worth saving, and why research administrators are more critical than ever in serving this public good.

Future articles will provide a brief history of the research enterprise in the United States, the related expansion of the field of research administration and the management of research, and culminate with a discussion on the value to society of having an informed public and a prepared workforce, both a result of the federal-higher education research partnership. The value to society—of university-based research is not a political matter, it benefits all of us, without borders, or discrimination. It is a public good. And we need to tell the story.

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Artificial Intelligence in Research: Compliance Implications

By Rani Muthukrishnan, PhD

With new developments in Artificial Intelligence surfacing every day, Institutional Review Boards and Human Research Protection Programs have their work cut out for them. While the possibilities are endless and great, so too are the risks, and research administrators must learn to navigate this new terrain responsibly, ethically, and in full compliance with government and institutional standards.

As artificial intelligence (AI) continues to transform research—from data analysis to manuscript drafting—research administrators must navigate evolving regulatory and ethical terrain. Understanding compliance implications is essential, especially when AI is applied to human subjects' data, analyses, and writing.

AI in Data Analysis and Writing

Generative AI and machine learning tools are rapidly gaining traction in biomedical research workflows. These tools are being used for a wide range of tasks such as assistance with exploratory data analysis, pattern identification, literature summarization, and even drafting sections of grant proposals or manuscripts. While these tools enhance productivity, they also pose critical compliance risks, especially when sensitive data or public-facing outputs are involved.

Research Administrators now have structured frameworks like the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) Generative AI Usage Toolkit, which provides checklists for task appropriateness, verification methods, attribution statements, and documentation workflows to ensure transparency and oversight in AI-assisted drafting and data analysis (National Institutes of Health, 2025a).

Risks of Fabricated Data and AI-Generated Misstatements

Generative AI tools are powerful and help to cut down the time required to complete a task, but they can also produce fabricated information—commonly referred to as hallucinations or "made-up" statements. In research contexts, presenting such inaccuracies could constitute research misconduct.

NIH explicitly warns that such misuse can trigger actions addressing noncompliance (National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health, 2024). Research administrators must ensure institutional policies require rigorous human oversight and fact-checking of AI-generated outputs prior to publication or proposal submission.

IRB Considerations for AI Tools

Institutional Review Boards (IRBs) and Human Research Protection Programs (HRPPs) face new challenges when AI tools are integrated into research involving human subjects. Questions arise around whether AI-driven studies fall under the Common Rule, how identifiability and privacy are addressed, and how informed consent must adapt in AI contexts.

The Secretary's Advisory Committee on Human Research Protections (SACHRP) emphasizes that secondary use of data—even if initially collected for another purpose—may still require IRB oversight, especially when AI enables re-identification through combining datasets or applying advanced algorithms (U.S. Department of Health and Human Services, 2023). IRBs must scrutinize risk of bias, confidentiality protections, informed consent disclosures, and whether AI validation activities constitute generalizable research requiring full review.

“AI holds tremendous potential in accelerating research, from analytics to writing. Yet, it poses non-trivial risks—fabrication, privacy breaches, non-compliance—especially in human-subject and genomic research.”

NIH Ruling on Generative AI for Human-Subject Genomic Research

A major compliance development as of March 28, 2025 is the NIH's Guide Notice NOT-OD-25-081, Protecting Human Genomic Data when Developing Generative Artificial Intelligence Tools and Applications. Key points for research administrators include:

- Under the NIH Genomic Data Sharing (GDS) Policy and Data Use Certification (DUC) agreement, sharing controlled-access genomic data—or derivatives including trained AI models or model parameters—with unauthorized users or public AI tools is strictly prohibited (National Institutes of Health, 2025b).
- Generative AI models trained on protected genomic data are considered data derivatives and must not be retained after project close-out unless re-approved. They may only be shared with collaborators listed as Approved Users in the original data access request (National Institutes of Health, 2025b).
- Violations risk breaching the non-transferability provision of the Data Use Certification (DUC) (National Institutes of Health, 2025b).
- NIH has invited public comments on responsible AI tool development and strategies to mitigate data leakage risk, membership inference attacks, and other privacy threats (National Institutes of Health, 2025c).

What Research Administrators Should Do

Action Area	Recommended Steps
Policy Awareness	Ensure staff understand NOT-OD-25-081, the GDS Policy, DUC non-transferability clause, and prohibited actions when using controlled-access genomic data.
Data Use Agreements	Confirm that DUC terms cover AI-derived models and require proper destruction or renewal at close-out.
IRB Oversight	Require IRBs to evaluate AI-driven research under the Common Rule, informed consent modifications, privacy risk, and validation oversight.
AI Usage Controls	Implement NIH Toolkit practices: task checklists, attribution statements, documentation, and verification workflows (National Institutes of Health, 2025a).
Training & Communication	Educate researchers on AI compliance risks, especially around fabricated content and unapproved data sharing.
Monitoring Policy Updates	Stay alert for future NIH guidance on sharing and retention of AI models trained on controlled-access data.

Conclusion

AI holds tremendous potential in accelerating research, from analytics to writing. Yet, it poses non-trivial risks—fabrication, privacy breaches, non-compliance—especially in human-subject and genomic research. Research administrators play a pivotal role in ensuring AI is deployed responsibly, ethically, and in full compliance with NIH and federal standards.

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AI Use Statement

ChatGPT (OpenAI, San Francisco, CA) was used to assist with language editing and organization of the manuscript. The authors reviewed and verified all AI-assisted content to ensure accuracy and integrity.

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Artificial Intelligence Chatbots in Research Administration: Testing Practical Applications in Research Development and Pre-Award

By Margaret Light, MS, CRA, & Shipra Mittal, MS, MBA

We use AI every day without consciously knowing it. In this article, the authors test some of the ways that AI can help with day-to-day work in research administration, and analyze how well the chatbot did in generating those outputs.

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is making strides in all areas of our lives, from professional work to organizing personal travel. We use AI every day without consciously knowing it. In this article, the authors test how AI can help with day-to-day work in research administration and analyze how well the chatbot generated those outputs.



Research Development

We tested Gemini 2.5 to find funding opportunities and to see how well it did compared to paid grant search databases such as GrantForward. We tested two prompts, starting with a general prompt to find funding opportunities in education in an AI chatbot, and compared the results with GrantForward. The AI output was reasonable, though not a comprehensive list of funding agencies. Using this prompt, the AI included the US DOE, NSF, NEA, NEH, eight private foundations, and eight corporate giving programs. GrantForward yielded close to 1,500 funding opportunities with ~300 in federal, 628 in foundation, and 31 in corporate funding.

Next, we tried 'Funding opportunities in STEM Education' as a prompt, which yielded 147 results in GrantForward, with 95 in federal, 32 in foundation, and 2 in corporate, using all keywords/phrases. This time, the AI chatbot included NASA, DoD, NSF, and US DOE under federal grants, about 13 private foundations, and seven corporate giving programs.

The AI chatbot did better with the second prompt in finding corporate funding programs than GrantForward. GrantForward found many

opportunities in other categories in both prompts. The AI chatbot's limitation is that it provides general sponsors instead of specific, open-funding opportunities and misses key details such as eligibility and deadlines. In addition, the chatbot lacks the filter feature to sort results by funding amounts, activity, and applicant locations.

These results present the number of funding opportunities found. However, the applicability of opportunities will depend on the researcher's area of interest. The eligibility criteria will also differ based on the applicant's institution and experience, so the AI tools should be customized to provide results specific to the organization.

Pre-Award

We tested Gemini 2.5 to summarize an NSF solicitation and create a checklist. While the chatbot presented a good summary, some information was incorrect. For example, the chatbot stated a limit of three pages for the Biographical sketches. Per PAPPG 24-1, Biographical sketches are no longer limited. The chatbot also stated a 3-page limit for budget justifications when the limit is five pages. Therefore, checking the output for accuracy is imperative.

We tested an NSF solicitation in Gemini 2.5 to outline the project description. The chatbot gave a good outline of the sections to include in the project description. It also did well in outlining components of the proposal narrative for two foundation applications. While the chatbot gave a general proposal outline, the specific content will depend on the proposed work. However, the outline helps carve a way to start, especially when applying to uncommon funding calls.

Artificial Intelligence can aid in the generation of proposal concept ideas. Chatbots can enhance proposals by providing context, such as identifying the target audience's needs and outcomes that could contribute to a broader impact section. As an example of concept development for a grant proposal, a prompt could be "What are some potential learning outcomes of this program?", and AI can also structure and simplify writing. For example, it can fit content to word count limitations on application forms.

Another example is generating what components should be included in proposal elements. For example, what should a data safety and monitoring plan (DSMP) consist of for NIH proposals? Gemini 2.5 gave a good description but did not include NIH institute-specific information as an answer to this prompt. Asking what a DSMP should include specifically for an NIH institute yielded a response customized for that institute. Asking a specific prompt is key to getting usable content. A user may not realize that NIH has specific DSMP guidelines for proposal development that vary for different institutes/centers. If they are using AI chatbots, it is essential to refer back to the source of the information.

For developing a budget justification, Gemini 2.5 gave fairly detailed templates for an NSF budget. However, the placement of several categories was incorrect. For example, equipment was placed on line E instead of D, travel landed on line D instead

of E, and participant support costs were included on line J under other direct costs instead of line F. Corrections are needed with the output for a reliable budget justification template. Templates generated by AI also tend to miss variations in pay rates across different colleges within a university.

Chatbots could be used to review contracts for terms and conditions of concern (Harmon & Schultz, 2025). They can also create custom contract clauses, such as complicated renewal timing. For example, a chatbot could draft a clause stating that an agreement will only be renewed if specific external conditions are met, such as continuing federal grant funding. ChatGPT was able to draft this clause and then offered to integrate it into an existing clause.

Cautionary Notes

Be aware that OpenAI will use your data to train the algorithm, so data privacy and security must be maintained (Royce, 2024). Avoid entering demographic, confidential, or proprietary information. Do not include unsubmitted proposals, project budgets, or unpublished research. With that said, many institutes are using enterprise versions of chatbots that are secure and do not store or use data to train the chatbot.

Some federal agencies require attribution of AI used in proposal development within references (Kuhn, 2025). However, AI is best used as an assistive tool, rather than for writing proposals. Plagiarism or other factual errors may result from relying on AI for content development. All content entered into AI tools becomes part of the database and is available to other users when using OpenAI.

Conclusion

AI chatbots can increase efficiency and improve communications related to research administration. They are helpful in summarizing and generating concepts, and in structuring and enhancing writing. However, it is not advisable to rely solely on AI's

output. Always check the generated information for accuracy, especially for federal grants, to keep up with changing regulations. Be specific in your prompts to get information relevant to your programs and refer back to the source of the information to understand the whole picture.

New opportunities are possible with AI, though not without its challenges. It has a significant potential for streamlining research administration with optimization. We will need continuous testing and development as we learn to integrate AI to improve our work and enhance efficiency.

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Cheating or Evolving? Rethinking Ethics in the Age of AI

By Mark Lucas, CRA

When AI started becoming generally available, it seemed like forbidden fruit. Data could be taken and used under one's own name. One could steal someone else's ideas and very words. Is this not plagiarism? Therefore, is use of AI not cheating?

When I was growing up, I was taught that the hard way was the best way. I learned that doing long division was a better methodology than using a calculator. I learned that reading the book was better than seeing the movie or scanning Cliff's Notes. I learned that encyclopedias were your friends- but not the end point of research. It was very much a culture of DIY and getting your hands into the weeds. Creativity superseded citing dry facts. Nevertheless, the moral was to draft on a blank page from what was in your head, using researched facts as a starting point.

When AI started becoming generally available, it seemed like forbidden fruit. You could look up anything, and it would appear. Knowledge became accessible, more in-depth, and more immediate. But, then—could I not use this for my own purposes? Could I not just copy what was provided and utilize it to answer questions, provide basic content, or even call it my own? The thought did not occur to me until a colleague did just that. My initial reaction was: Isn't this cheating? Isn't this stealing someone else's ideas and very words? Is this not plagiarism 101?

Aghast, I faced a self-inflicted conflict. Why is it ok to cite AI output as one's own, when we do not do this for Google results, Wikipedia, or other online sources? Are there new ethical standards needed? Could one not just copy what AI generates in about 10 seconds and claim it as their own? Why was this acceptable to some? Or was I really the outlier here?

I value AI tools as successors to old encyclopedias, where basic data is stored. When this data migrated online, one could look up the information as a quick resource. The fact that AI programs now deliver the data in quick bites or long paragraphs—which could easily be copied—should not make any difference in use of the data. The fact that it's not copyrighted should not make a difference either.

Further, I think the ease of the tool troubled me. If something that once took me an hour now takes one minute, is that a miracle—or is there a cost? Once I had the basic data, my instinct was to use it as a reference and start re-writing in my own words. Others asked why I'd waste my time doing that when the answers were right there—there was no need to write anything else.

I suspect the issue was partially my unfamiliarity with the tool, and partly a change in standards regarding AI use. While copying and claiming its output as your own still seems ethically wrong, using AI as a resource seems logical. But then the question remains: When is it ok to use AI, and when does it cross the line into plagiarism?

We asked ChatGPT this very question. ChatGPT responded: "Whether using AI is considered cheating depends entirely on how, when, and why you're using it — and on the rules or expectations of the context you're in." Further ChatGPT claimed that it could be considered plagiarism if "you use it to complete assignments, tests, or tasks that you're expected to do yourself" and when "you're misrepresenting AI-generated work as your own, especially when the goal is to show your personal understanding or skills."

We then reached out to UCLA Assistant Professor of Computational Medicine Harold Pimentel with this question. Dr. Pimentel felt, "Generally, I don't view ChatGPT as cheating. I think most people use it as a high-powered internet search. However, I do worry about students lacking the fundamentals to understand how to use ChatGPT. In particular, in internet searches, there is usually context which is necessary to understanding the answer, or the building blocks to the answer. With ChatGPT, this context is often missing and without knowing the fundamentals students can miss key leaps that the model made, some of which can often be incorrect. In such cases, I worry that students miss many learning opportunities. The more basic and fundamental the material, the greater the chance for this sort of error to occur, leading to large chunks of foundational knowledge missed."

So: Is use of AI cheating? It can be. Like any other source, it's a warehouse of data. This is where ethics needs to come in. Verbatim copying is indeed cheating. The intent of AI is to minimize repetitive or basic activities. If one can save time through researching something, that's a clear benefit of these tools. It is then incumbent upon the user to ethically use the data in a proper way.

I've learned that having AI do much of the work for me is the intended function—and not inherently cheating. I may not need to do long division anymore, but I do need to show how I got to the answer. In the end, it seems that the answer itself is no longer paramount; it is the process of getting there and interpreting the result in your own words (for example, doing the analysis yourself that is the expectation. Anything else is cheating.

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Using Artificial Intelligence to Create an Interactive CRA Exam Study Session

By Julie Swaringim-Griffin, PhD

With a quick prompt to ChatGPT, three interactive study activities were created to help prepare research administrators at our institution for the CRA Exam.

Creating a Certified Research Administrator (CRA) Exam Study Group at your institution can be highly impactful in many ways. From increasing the possibility of having certified research administrators to building rapport with those you work with, a CRA study group can contribute to many positives. However, planning, setting up the study group, creating curriculum,



and so forth can be highly time consuming. Many institutions shy away from such planning because of the time it takes to prepare and execute any type of professional development. At our institution, we employ several activities throughout the year for research administrators. We provide a certificate program, CRA Exam Study Group, a fun scavenger hunt, and a yearly conference.

Recently, we decided to revamp our CRA Exam Study Group because, quite frankly, it was boring. We decided to do something we have never done before, and we recruited Artificial Intelligence (AI) to help us out. With a quick prompt asking ChatGPT to create five interactive activities for a CRA Exam Study Day, we received the curated activities in under three minutes. Three of the five activities made sense but two of them were discarded. We used the three and

made a few slight changes to make it work for our group. We then input these changes into ChatGPT and asked for it to create an output of questions/answers for each activity. It did! In less than 30 minutes, we curated three interactive activities and prepared the materials for the CRA Exam Study Day. Then it was time for the big day. It was a hit! Those who attended the study day mentioned that it was a good session and was interactive. Finally, our CRA Exam Study Group was no longer boring. Instead, it was interactive, enjoyable, and informative.

Overall, recruiting AI to help us with the CRA Exam Study Day was helpful. Although we had to make a few adjustments to the content ChatGPT created, it gave us a usable starting point and saved us time by allowing us to create something unique for our team.

Disclaimer: Please note, this is the original work of the author. Artificial Intelligence was not used to write this article.

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The Basic Uses of AI in Research Administration

By Betty Morgan

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming how we work across industries, and research administration is no exception. Let's take a look at a few basic ways to start using AI in the research administration profession!

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly transforming how we work across industries, and research administration is no exception. While the role of a research administrator will always require critical thinking, professional judgment, and human relationships, AI can be a valuable tool to enhance efficiency, accuracy, and decision-making. Here are some of the most practical ways AI can support our work.

Document Review and Drafting

AI-powered tools can help review and draft common research administration documents such as budget justifications, compliance checklists, or standard operating procedures. By analyzing large sets of sample text, AI can quickly suggest language, flag inconsistencies, and/or help ensure formatting and terminology are consistent.

Example: Drafting initial versions of internal communications or proposal templates, which can then be refined by the administrator.

Proposal and Grant Application Support

AI tools can assist with:

- Checking applications for compliance with sponsor guidelines.
- Summarizing lengthy funding announcements into key requirements.
- Suggesting missing elements or inconsistencies in narratives.

While AI won't replace the expertise of a grant administrator, it can save time in the initial review process, providing more time for other tasks.

Data Analysis and Reporting

From tracking proposal volume to analyzing post-award spending patterns, AI can sift through large datasets to identify trends and anomalies. This can be a great tool in projections, burn rates, and reporting.

Example: Using AI-driven dashboards to spot potential underspending or overspending before deadlines, enabling proactive communication with principal investigators (PIs).

Compliance Monitoring

AI can scan documents, transactions, and project data to identify potential compliance issues—such as expenditures outside approved categories or missed reporting deadlines. AI could be utilized in tandem with other task management tools to provide overall coverage.

Example: Automated alerts when a project is approaching its end date and deliverables are outstanding.

Training and Knowledge Management

With staff turnover and evolving sponsor regulations, maintaining institutional knowledge is a challenge. AI can help organize, search, and retrieve relevant guidance or historical records quickly. It can be used to build a repository of resources for grant management.

Example: Using AI-powered search tools to pull past successful proposals in a specific field or with a specific sponsor.

Streamlining Communication

AI chatbots or smart assistants can be configured to answer common faculty or department questions about submission deadlines, budget policies, or routing procedures—reducing repetitive inquiries to the research office. These FAQs could be placed on websites and/or intranets as resources.

Important Considerations

While AI offers clear benefits, it must be used thoughtfully and carefully:

- **Human oversight is essential**—AI suggestions should always be reviewed for accuracy, context, tone and most importantly, compliance with the Institution, as well as sponsored regulations (as applicable).
- **Data privacy and security must be maintained**—sensitive project or personnel information should not be entered into public AI tools without appropriate safeguards.
- **Bias awareness**—AI models can reflect biases in their training data, so results should be evaluated critically.

AI is not here to replace research administrators—it's here to help us work smarter. By adopting AI tools in targeted, responsible ways, we can reduce administrative burdens, improve accuracy, and focus more energy on supporting the success of our research community.

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Research administrators are the constant in a world of constant change—where policies shift, budgets tighten, teams connect (around conference tables or across screens), and new technologies reconstruct the landscape overnight. Complexity grows, challenges emerge, and the stakes keep rising.

Through it all, research moves forward—because of research administrators across the globe. You adapt. You guide. You solve. Your work builds the infrastructure that allows research to thrive. Every grant managed, every compliance hurdle cleared, every project closed out—you make the next step possible.

This Research Administrator Day, SRAI celebrates research administrators everywhere: the innovators, the strategists, the stewards of progress. Our members. Our sister organizations. Our dedicated partners. Thank you for all that you do.

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REGULATORY & COMPLIANCE OVERSIGHT

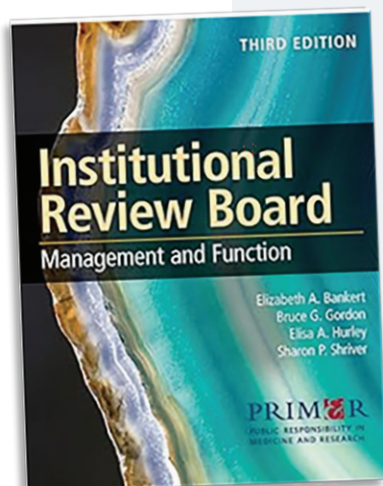
Back to the Basics: Reference Guides Every Research Admin Should Know

By Rani Muthukrishnan, PhD, & Anita Trupiano, MS

For research administrators, understanding the key reference guides, federal frameworks, and day-to-day responsibilities tied to these areas is non-negotiable. This list of resources brings you back to basics—not as a refresher, but as a toolbox for mastering compliance, supporting investigators, and fostering a culture of responsible conduct in research.

In the world of research administration, regulatory knowledge isn't just helpful, it's essential. Whether you're reviewing a new protocol or troubleshooting compliance gaps, your ability to navigate core oversight areas like Institutional Review Board (IRB), Institutional Animal Care and Use Committee (IACUC), grants, and clinical trials can make or break the integrity of a research program. These domains, while distinct in scope, all share a common foundation: the ethical protection of human and animal subjects, institutional accountability, and regulatory precision. For research administrators, understanding the key reference guides, federal frameworks, and day-to-day responsibilities tied to these areas is non-negotiable. This article brings you the books that help you get back to basics—not as a refresher, but as a toolbox for mastering compliance, supporting investigators, and fostering a culture of responsible conduct in research.

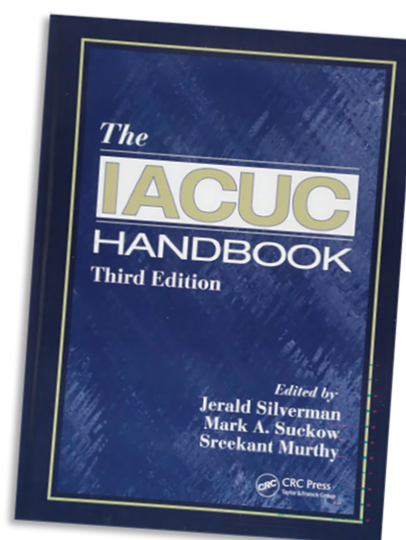
Institutional Review Board: Management and Function

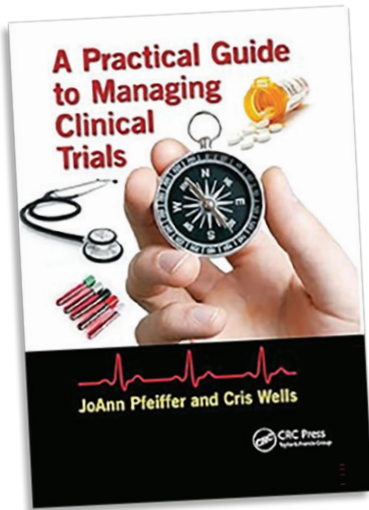


This comprehensive guide offers a practical and ethical roadmap for managing IRBs in compliance with federal regulations and best practices. Developed in partnership with PRIM&R, the text serves as a foundational resource for IRB administrators, chairs, and members. It covers the full operational scope of IRBs—including protocol review, informed consent, continuing review, exempt determinations, and investigator compliance—with detailed discussions on the Common Rule (45 CFR 46), Federal Drug Administration (FDA) regulations, and international guidelines. Real-world case studies and sample SOPs support practical application. The book emphasizes the ethical principles outlined in the Belmont Report, while offering insight into policy development, staff training, audit preparedness, and board member education. Known for its clarity and authority, this text remains a go-to reference in human subjects research protection.

The IACUC Handbook (3rd Edition)

Widely regarded as the definitive reference for IACUCs, this third edition offers a comprehensive exploration of regulatory oversight and best practices in animal research administration. It updates federal policy interpretations and integrates the latest Guide for the Care and Use of Laboratory Animals, the 2013 American Veterinary Medical Association (AVMA) euthanasia guidelines, and Office of Laboratory Animal Welfare (OLAW) FAQs. Compiled by seasoned IACUC professionals, the text features real-world institutional surveys, operational benchmarks, and an international comparison. The 827-page volume covers the full spectrum of committee responsibilities—from protocol review, continuing review, and post-approval monitoring to facility inspections, animal welfare, personnel training, and ethical frameworks. True to its reputation, it's often called “the Bible” for IACUC members and administrators navigating the complexities of animal welfare, compliance, and institutional accountability.





A Practical Guide to Managing Clinical Trials

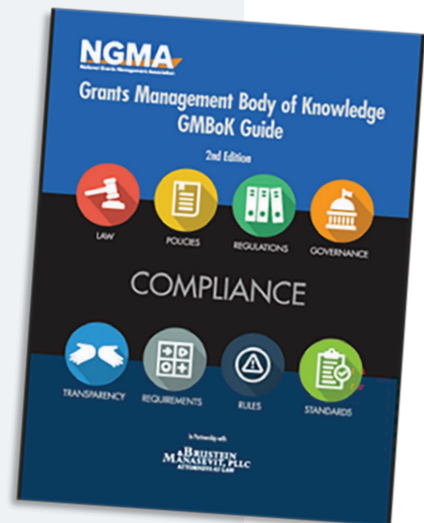
This volume provides step-by-step guidance tailored for professionals involved in research site operations. It covers the entire clinical trial process—from site selection and setup to subject recruitment, study visits, and close-out. Key topics include staff roles and responsibilities, training, budget and contract management, data and document handling, event reporting, research ethics, audits, informed consent processes, IRB and FDA regulations, and Good Clinical Practices (GCP). Each chapter concludes with a review of key points and knowledge application exercises. A unique feature of this edition is "A View from India," which provides a chapter-by-chapter comparison of clinical trial practices in India and the U.S., offering global context and operational insight into the challenges and opportunities in the emerging Indian clinical trials market.

Grants Management Body of Knowledge (GMBok) Guide

This book is designed as a comprehensive resource to assist grants management professionals in navigating the complexities of the grant lifecycle and provides detailed insights into federal financial assistance governance, the phases of the grants management lifecycle, and the application of internal controls to mitigate fraud, waste, and abuse. It also outlines the roles and responsibilities of auditors and auditees, supporting grants management professionals across all sectors. The GMBok Guide is updated regularly to reflect the latest federal standards and regulations, ensuring its relevance and utility in the ever-evolving field of grants management.

By providing authoritative federal standards, the Guide references key frameworks such as the Uniform Guidance (2 CFR Part 200), GAO's Standards for Internal Control, OMB Circular A-123 on risk management, and the annual OMB Compliance Supplement. Its scope makes it an essential resource for grants management professionals across federal agencies, state and local governments, tribal entities, higher education institutions, nonprofits, and private sector organizations.

The GMBok Guide is distributed as a read-only digital publication to protect copyright and is regularly updated to reflect current compliance requirements and best practices.



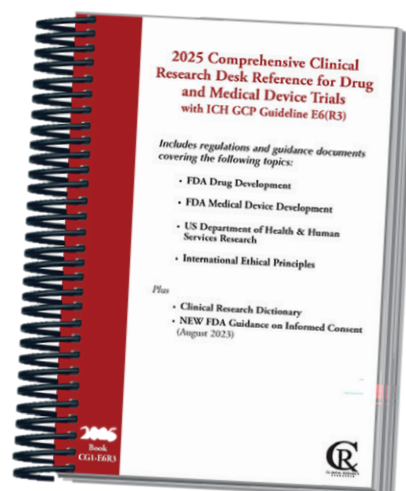
2025 Comprehensive Clinical Research Desk Reference for Drug and Medical Device Trials

The 2025 Comprehensive Clinical Research Desk Reference is a must-have for professionals involved in clinical trials for drugs and medical devices. Published by Clinical Research Resources, LLC, this robust, 750+ page reference consolidates essential regulatory documents, guidance, and policies from the FDA, Office for Human Research Protections (OHRP), and International Council for Harmonisation of Technical Requirements for Pharmaceuticals for Human Use (ICH) into a single, easy-to-navigate resource.

Updated as of April 1, 2025, the guide includes critical sections of 21 CFR—such as Parts 11 (electronic records), 50 (informed consent), 56 (IRBs), 312 (Investigational New Drug), and 314 (New Drug Application)—alongside international standards like the ICH E6 GCP guidelines. It also features ethical frameworks such as the Belmont Report and the Declaration of Helsinki.

Designed for coordinators, monitors, and compliance staff, this spiral-bound reference is both a daily-use toll and a robust training resource. It's spiral-bound for ease of use and updated regularly to reflect new regulatory guidance, including the latest FDA informed consent updates.

What are your go-to reference guides as a research administrator? Share your essentials with us and keep the toolbox growing.



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Do You Need a Data Use Agreement?

By Kimberly Read, PhD, & Janet Reyes

You have a Request for Application to review for a new principal investigator, who will be using a dataset from another institution. How do you evaluate if this project will involve a Data Use Agreement?

You have a Request For Application to review for a new principal investigator (PI) in the College of Education. You have enough time to do a read-through and start your checklist for the first meeting with Dr. Eager. She has an eye on an Institute of Education Sciences grant on the topic of Early Intervention in Special Education. Check! This is an area of research focus in Dr. Eager's department and fits well with available resources.



“The Common Rule, 45 CFR Part 46, subpart A, is Federal law that provides “a robust set of protections for research subjects.”

Her focus is goal four, Effectiveness. You jump to that section of the Research Plan and note that this goal requires your PI to independently evaluate a fully-developed intervention. Hold! What intervention is Dr. Eager using? Where is she getting the data? When you reach out to ask this question, you find out that she will be using a dataset from another institution.

Okay, if this proposal is awarded, Dr. Eager may need to draft a Data Use Agreement (DUA). A DUA is a contract between the institution that owns a data set, an institution that will receive, as a whole or in part, the data for their own use, and occasionally a third party who will receive the data. The Common Rule, 45 CFR Part 46, subpart A, is Federal law that provides “a robust set of protections for research subjects.” The requirements of the law detail the circumstances under which data may be shared. A DUA satisfies the law by outlining the “terms and limitations on how the shared data can be used,” and it details the criteria that a receiving institution must meet to be eligible to receive the data (NIH, 2022). A DUA should address:

- Limitations on the use of data
- Liability for harm from the use of data
- Publication rights
- Privacy rights
- Access, storage, protection, use, transmittal of data, and disposal of data

- Protected Health Info (PHI) and Personally Identifiable Information (PII)
- Scope of the data set
- Proprietary information
- Prevention of inappropriate use of protected or confidential information

The PHI is any personal health information that can potentially identify an individual that was created, used, or disclosed in the

course of providing healthcare services, whether it was a diagnosis, treatment, or research. The rule of thumb is that if any of the information is personally recognizable to the patient, or if it was utilized or discovered during the course of a healthcare service, it is PHI. The PII is any information that can be used to identify, contact, or locate a person. Examples of PHI and PII include:

- Names
- All elements of dates, except year, are directly related to an individual, including birth date, admission date, discharge date, etc.
- Addresses or geographic data smaller than a state, such as zip codes
- Telephone and fax numbers
- Social Security numbers
- Email addresses
- Medical record numbers
- Account numbers
- Vehicle identifiers and serial numbers, including license plates
- Web URLs
- Device identifiers and serial numbers
- Internet protocol addresses (IP addresses)
- Full face photos and comparable images

- Biometric identifiers (i.e., retinal scan, fingerprints)
- Any unique identifying number or code
- ID information, such as a driver's license or passport
- Credit card numbers
- Bank account numbers
- GPS location data
- Photos
- Employment or educational records

Knowing what counts as PHI or PII is crucial to guiding your PIs in the area of DUAs as they consider the requirements they will need to meet if their proposal is selected for award. The best way to reduce risk to your human subjects is to limit the data you receive to strictly what you need for your analysis, avoiding PHI/PII where possible, thereby minimizing the DUA process. The dataset Dr. Eager will receive contains de-identified test scores and aggregate demographics. After discussing these requirements with Dr. Eager, you determine together that she will not need to develop a DUA because there is no PHI or PII.

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The Role of Shared Services and Department Administrators in Sponsored Programs

By Shipra Mittal, MS, MBA

The Shared Services Office (SSO) can be critical in the realm of funding applications and managing sponsored projects. SSO helps reduce the administrative burden on faculty and departmental staff, while providing subject matter expertise to bridge communications and expertise between faculty and the central Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP).

The Shared Services Office (SSO) plays a vital role in applying for funding and managing sponsored projects. These are centralized offices serving multiple departments or centers within colleges. They consolidate specialized services in both pre- and post-award processes. Their support includes streamlining administrative tasks, enhancing compliance, and ensuring alignment with sponsor and institutional requirements.

According to Squilla, 2017, there are three primary models for SSOs:

- Model A: Cradle-to-Grave Grants administrators handle both pre- and post-award responsibilities.
- Model B: Specialized - Grants administrators focus solely on either pre- or post-award.
- Model C: Hybrid - Some units have grants administrators who manage both pre- and post-award; others split the responsibilities between specialists.

This article discusses the key service provided by SSOs and highlights their value in supporting central offices and faculty.

Pre-award services provided by SSO:

- Identifying funding opportunities.
- Supporting proposal preparation, including eligibility checks and compliance with Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) terms. This includes reviewing special sections required in the research strategy, restrictions such as budget caps, limits on the number of proposals per organization, indirect cost rate limitations, and other compliance requirements outlined in the FOA. SSO also provides support in developing budgets, budget justifications, biographical sketches, Current and Pending (Other) Support (when applicable), Facilities information, Data Management and Sharing Plans, and other supporting documents as needed.
- Gathering compliance documentation such as information on human subjects, export control, conflict of interest, intellectual property, and foreign collaborators.
- Conducting subrecipient risk assessment at pre-award stage and developing subaward documents.
- Supporting Just-In-Time (JIT) submissions, including certification collection, budget revisions, and routing to Office of Sponsored Programs (OSP).

Post-award Services provided by SSO:

- Facilitating award set-up.
- Managing finances: budget reconciliations, modifications, invoice assistance, cost analysis (fringe and indirect costs applied correctly to match agreed upon rates with the sponsors), cost transfers, voucher approvals, participant payments, and consultant onboarding.
- Assisting with effort certifications.

- Assisting faculty with preparation of project reports and central offices with preparation and verification of financial reports.
- Coordinating no-cost extensions.
- Assisting central offices with award closeouts.

The SSO administrators coordinate these tasks within their colleges or units and route them to central offices for a final approval.

Responsibilities of Central OSP:

As the institution's authorized representatives, central OSP staff hold signatory authority. Their core responsibilities include:

- Conducting compliance reviews and submitting proposals.
- Submitting Just-In-Time (JIT) materials to sponsors.
- Negotiating and executing agreements.
- Setting up awards.
- Issuing invoices and drawdowns.
- Maintaining institutional policies.
- Ensuring grant compliance.
- Closing out awards.

Role of Department Administrators (DAs):

In some institutions, DAs support faculty directly by managing tasks like:

- Creating purchase vouchers for supplies and equipment.
- Processing consultant payments, travel, salary allocations.
- Assisting with new employee hiring and onboarding, and employee re-appointments.

Organizations may adapt depending on the size and complexity of their grant portfolio. In smaller portfolios, DAs may provide both grant and operational support. In hybrid models, some units

may rely on specialized pre- and post-award SSO staff, while others lean on DAs for both grant and operational support. Where no SSO exists, central OSP typically handles all grants management functions.

Advantages of the SSO model:

1. Improved Internal Controls: Aligns with COSO framework (Commission, 2023) by ensuring segregation of duties. For instance, a DA may initiate a voucher, while SSO reviews it before routing for final approval. Proponents of moving all functions to central offices may not see the issues that come with centralizing all the functions. OSP typically manages the entire organization's portfolio so working directly with faculty in pre-award and post-award will increase OSP's workload and introduce challenges in maintaining segregation of duties.
2. Increased efficiency: Standardized processes

across departments lead to cost reduction and operational scalability.

3. Capacity building: SSOs provide training for junior faculty and new administrators on sponsor guidelines and institutional policies.
4. Enhanced Reporting Accuracy: The SSO model can increase reporting accuracy due to the close knowledge of the departments or centers.
5. Consistent Communication: SSOs facilitate dissemination of updates on changing sponsor policies or regulations.
6. Improved User Experience: Faculty benefit from working with a dedicated point of contact, leading to more personalized and responsive services.

In conclusion, SSO are integral to the research enterprise. By collaborating with central offices, they ensure a compliant, efficient, and faculty-friendly environment for managing sponsored programs.

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From "Black Box" to Senior Director: My Path in Research Administration

By Amanda Ferguson

Hear about one professional's decade of impactful work in research administration—the challenges, advice, and insights she gained while supporting mission-based research and fostering community in the field.

"Black box job application." That is my standard answer to how I ended up in research administration. Like many of us, I had no prior knowledge of research—but I needed a job, enjoyed working at an undergraduate advising office in college, and loved the idea of working in academia. I submitted my resume and was hired into Sponsored Projects at The University of Texas Health Science Center at Houston ("UTHH"), eventually moving to the Office of Institutional Compliance.



UTHH was formative to my career. I was fortunate to start this journey under incredible leaders who believed in the institution's mission, valued customer service, and invested in developing their teams. They were generous with their time and open to new ideas. Their mentorship helped create and solidify my passion for research and shaped my approach to working with people.

Today, I'm a Senior Director at Huron, a consulting firm specializing in education, healthcare, and research. I celebrated ten years with the firm in March. I'm privileged to work with institutions to address the myriad of challenges we navigate as research administrators, and I'm excited to share a few reflections with the SRAI Catalyst readers.

Advice to My Younger Self?

Learn as much as you can about your institution's broader operating environment. Research is usually one of three main missions, alongside education and service. Understanding what drives the other two helps contextualize the challenges researchers face and the decisions institutions make.

Best Part About Working for Huron?

Researchers are tackling the world's biggest challenges—from food security to climate resilience to curing rare diseases. I get to problem-solve alongside institutions to enable that research. I love spending my days supporting mission-based work and learning how different institutions operate. I've met some of the smartest, most fun people at Huron and among our clients. That combination of great people and meaningful problem-solving is a perfect fit for me.

Podcast Recommendations for SRAI Readers?

I have two!

- **The Happiness Lab**, hosted by a clinical psychologist, offers evidence-based strategies for being happier. Several of the strategies Dr. Santos discusses—like building a sense of community and asking for and receiving help—are supported through SRAI involvement.
- **Effort Report**, hosted by two researchers provide insight into faculty life. It's like seeing behind the curtain into their daily experiences and helps me better understand the pressures they face. Since our roles involve saying "no" due to compliance requirements, this podcast reminds me to approach difficult conversations with a customer service mindset.

Biggest Lesson I've Learned?

Everything comes down to relationships. Everyone wants to feel heard (I sometimes joke that my job feels more like being a therapist than anything else!). Investing time in building relationships – within your office, your institution, the broader research administration world – will pay off in spades.

And that's how we foster community. I truly believe research administrators are a model of connection and support. Folks are willing to share, brainstorm, and collaborate. Honestly, the SRAI meetings feel like summer camp—attendees are genuinely excited to reconnect with friends they've made over the years.

Who wouldn't want to be part of that?

AUTHORED BY:

Amanda Ferguson
Senior Director
Huron



Write for the *Catalyst*

SRAI's *Catalyst* is a monthly digital newsletter that features insights from top professionals in research management and administration, as well as updates on conferences, educational opportunities, member achievements, networking, and breaking trends from the field. The *Catalyst Quarterly* is a special magazine edition of the newsletter spotlighting the latest news and resources, as well as the highlights from every quarter.

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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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