Stefanie Keto: (00:05)
Welcome to SRAI Shop Talk, a monthly podcast spotlighting the people, practices, and evolving landscape of research administration and the community that works collectively to support it. Whether you are new to the field or a seasoned pro, each episode features insights from experts across institutions, big and small, working in pre-award and post- award, compliance, communication, and everything in between. I'm Stephanie Keto, based at the Office of Post-Award Financial Services at North Carolina State University.

(00:41)
This season, we're exploring the theme Bridge Builders: Creating Unity Across Roles, Generations, and Technologies. Welcome everyone to today's episode of SRAI Shop Talk. Transitioning to a shared service model sounds brilliant on paper, but how does it actually hold up in practice? Today, we're going to get the scoop on how this works from implementation to day-to-day operations. We're going to explore how to survive the early growing pains and maintaining excellent customer service to ensuring that the return on investment is reliable, and what you can do to keep the model sustainable. We've got a fantastic group here, so let's kick things off with a quick introduction. Would you all please introduce yourselves and provide an overview of your roles and expertise?

Marcos Garza: (01:36)
I'm Marcos Garza. I'm the AVP of research operations for the University of Miami's Miller School of Medicine. And I've been in research administration pretty much since I got out of college, which is now 20 some years ago. And I am very privileged and honored to be the current president-elect for SRAI. The shared resource that I currently oversee for research administration at the University of Miami is referred to as our research development services, and they provide pre and post-award support to various departments, either departments who don't have enough volume to really justify having their own person, but also some departments that have chosen or been encouraged to be part of the RDS model of the shared resource model to ensure that their grants are properly administered and submitted.

Francine Davis: (02:31)
Hi, everyone. I am Francine Davis. I am the senior director for two of our School of Medicine's shared service models. There were nine across the university. Now they've established a few more. And my specific role is for two of those units. They're referred to as ABOS and HSS. They're both acronyms for the departments that we support. And another part of my role, it's the anomaly. I support the dean's office as well. And I have been at Emory for, this year will be 32 years. So I've been in research administration for a very, very long time.

(03:10)
I have specific oversight for both pre and post-award administration for both of those units. And then with my school hat, some of that delves into HR, into budgeting, into strategic planning. So the role spans a lot of different areas. And so being in the shared service model for this length of time has given me some opportunity to see things that have been working pretty well and in some of the areas where we have some challenges. So happy to be a part of this discussion today.

Tracey Volz: (03:42)
Hi everyone. My name is Tracey Volz. I'm the vice president for sponsored research operations at the NYU Langone Health and Grossman School of Medicine. Really, I oversee all things sponsored research. So pre-award, post-award, that's the central offices, including our compliance and finance offices, but then also our integrated support model for our shared services. So I'm excited to be part of this. I'm so excited to learn and hear from Francine and Marcos also their experiences and thanks for having me.

Stefanie Keto: (04:14)
Yeah, thank you all for coming. Welcome to the episode. And I guess to really get the conversation started, first question I have for you would be why did your institutions decide to adopt the shared service model?

Marcos Garza: (04:29)
I'll go ahead and kick us off there on that. So for the University of Miami, the Middle School of Medicine, we're still, I would say a hybrid. So we do have departments that certainly have their own research administration infrastructure as well. We have our central research administration, the authorized officials, institutional official, and then we have our shared resource within the executive dean for research office.

(04:53)
And we stood up that model. One was mostly, it started really for the departments that just don't really have enough every year to justify their own person, I think is how it got started. And then over time as we built it up and hired the right people into that unit and it's become what we would like to think of as the place to go for the best research admin support you can get. And I think now we've brought in some larger, much larger departments that get support from that unit as well as expanded it to provide training grant support for units.

(05:35)
Because I think training grants are very specific, and they can be very time intensive for departments to pull together. So even a department that has their own people, suddenly when their PI wants

to do a big training grant, they may not have the bandwidth, the resources, or the expertise to do it. So I would say the institution as a whole is a movement to this model, but we've brought in a good chunk of the research portfolio into this model is what we've done. And yes, there are absolutely cost savings to it and economies of scale that can be achieved. But for us, it was more about ensuring that the standards of excellence that our dean and our leadership wants can be adhered to and managed so that our PIs are getting a more VIP experience with their pre and post-award support.

Stefanie Keto: (06:28)
I like that VIP experience.

Tracey Volz: (06:32)
The trick is keeping and making sure it is VIP experience.

Marcos Garza: (06:34)
That is the hardest part. It's not always VIP, if I'm being completely honest, but we really try for it.

Stefanie Keto: (06:44)
I'm sure the PI is like that, though.

Tracey Volz: (06:46)
We were similar. So I've been at NYU for almost 14 years, which seems strange to say that out loud. I realize I didn't say this earlier, but I'm a scientist researcher turned administrator, but it's been 20-ish years since I've been on the science side. We have had this kind of, initially it was referred to as the pod model, which I've tried to shift away from, just because when it was great, it was great. When it wasn't, it's like, oh, it's all the pod. But it's not a bad thing now. We're in a good place.

(07:18)
But it came from leadership, I think, and we started out as a pilot. The value proposition, I think so much what Marcos was saying, the cost efficiency and savings actually was not the focus. That was not a value proposition that was initially part of it. And it was brought to me from leadership as far as this has been discussed a lot, let's see how can we do this from a standardization perspective and experience for the faculty, because we have 30-plus institutes and academic departments.

(07:47)
All of them have 30-plus different ways of how they provide service or what the pre and the post-award teams are doing. And then for me, the biggest part that I really appreciate and enjoy is the growth and the retention of the talent. A lot of times, and we're hybrid as well, but the majority are in the integrated model. A lot of times, if you

don't have or if you have a team in a department, it could be one person, it could be five people. And if it's one person, it can be really isolating. And if you want to go on vacation or if something happens, who supports the faculty? And so I think the concept of having a bench, but also having this community and this network for this really niche talent that our research administrators was for me personally the biggest part of why I felt it was exciting to be a part of.

Francine Davis: (08:45)
And then I'll say, for Emory initially, in our structure, we are probably the only ones right now that are in a full shared service model, but it's kind of an extension of our departments. And so when the need kind of came up is what Tracey said, where you had different people that were research administrators in multiple different departments, but some departments had a good level of support, and some only had one person. I came from a department where I was the one person. And so it was very, very challenging during those times if you were doing both pre and post-award and you have a significant amount of volume.

(09:24)
So when the conversation started coming up about how they could, the university as a whole could provide better service to the faculty, one of the things that came up out of that conversation was the shared service model. It was a pretty intensive initiative, and that was one of the things as a part of transforming Emory at that time. And so the goal really was just to really improve efficiency, reduce some of the duplication of the administrative work across the board, try to standardize some processes. And that was the initial concept, I think, of coming into the shared service model.

(10:00)
Now, one of the things that I don't think could probably vetted better was how much staff would be required to be in that kind of model because you were literally taking people from existing departments and moving them into a shared service center. And so that presented a significant amount of challenges because you had either people that were cradle to grave where they did both pre and post-award, or you had some that did pre, some that did post. And now people basically had to pick a side because our structure, by the time they built it out, became siloed. So the concept of the model itself was initially great, but it did come inherently with some challenges in the beginning.

Stefanie Keto: (10:45)
Well, and that leads to the next question. So you kind of kicked it off, what kind of initial challenges were there when you were trying to get it started? Obviously, that would be a primary one, I think, because

that would also lead to potential training issues as well. But what other issues arose when this kicked off for y'all?

Tracey Volz: (11:06)
We started out as a pilot, and we do that a lot, I think, from a change management perspective, because then hopefully it feels a little more friendly. And what we found was, so we started out with a really small team, and we were supporting, Marcos, what you were saying, it was the departments that just didn't have enough expertise, or any at all. And so that value prop was actually really easy to come in and say, "We will help you. We will provide the service. You don't have it."

(11:32)
What we found was we had a huge demand that we were not prepared for, to say like, "Oh, you exist now. Amazing. So this person's on leave, et cetera. Can we come in?" And so it was an exciting time of growth, and it was really fast growth, but part of that challenge was that we grew too fast because we weren't prepared for all of that. And so for the departments where they were getting something that they didn't have before, perfect, amazing, great. For those who kind of felt like-

(12:02)
Amazing. Great. For those who felt like you're not giving me the VIP service that you're saying it is... And we didn't necessarily say that at first, or, "I have this, I don't need you," it created a lot of dynamics around just, oh, they're eventually going to come and take over. And to where I spent probably a whole... It's been, my goodness, somehow five years, and we went from supporting four departments to now 28. And I had a whole, I don't know, full court press around, we're not coming in to infiltrate your brains. We don't change the people, we don't physically take the people, it's really the connection piece of it and trying to frame it and change it around, because a lot of our areas were very welcome and thank you so much, and others were like, thanks, but no thanks. And I think that probably exists now. So, I'm sure there are some listeners now-

Marcos Garza: (13:00)
Yeah, we-

Tracey Volz: (13:01)
... who are like, yeah, I'm there and I don't want to go there. Nope, Tracey can't come over and take my team.

Marcos Garza: (13:05)
Yeah. We encounter the two here, there are those that are very happy to join the model, there are those that need to be encouraged to join the model, and there are those that will probably never want to be in the model. And then, there are those that I also think

shouldn't be in the model. I always use, not because of them specifically, but their portfolio. So, I think for me, the Department of Peds is a great example. They have, at least ours at least, has such a idiosyncratic portfolio of clinical trials and little foundations and state money and local money and NIH money, and pediatrics is its own kind of animal, so it does need a specialized support there and its own people either within the departmental structure or at least specifically assigned to them in the law. Because I do think that depending on what your portfolio looks like, you do need people who just know that part of it.

Tracey Volz: (14:11)
For sure.

Marcos Garza: (14:11)
And for us, I think I probably did make that mistake of selling it as a VIP experience before. And it's not always the VIP experience, but we are always continuously working on improving it. So I'm trying to make sure that everyone understands that this is a good thing. And we also had that, I think when I said, okay, we're going to provide support for training grants. You don't have to be in the model, but if you need help with a training grant, we'll help you. And in my mind I still thought, and to be honest, it's been a while since I've submitted a proposal, I still though of training grants as just like Ts in the R25 here and there. And everyone else heard, oh, any kind of training grant Fs or Ks...

Tracey Volz: (15:01)
Oh, yeah, yeah.

Marcos Garza: (15:01)
And so, I had to walk that back just a little bit to be like, no, no, we're not ready, we don't have the bandwidth really to take on every kind of training grant, really, I just meant the Ts and the R25s.

Tracey Volz: (15:09)
That was a hard piece for us because as we were trying to grow and at the same time wanting to make this be a good thing, you also wanted to, when people asked and needed your help, you wanted to provide it. And so, it took us probably our first year to be like, we need to say yes when we can and also be like, we would love to, but not quite yet type of thing.

Francine Davis: (15:34)
Whoa.

Stefanie Keto: (15:34)
[inaudible 00:15:36].

Tracey Volz: (15:35)
But yeah, it's been quite a roller coaster of learning the past five years.

Francine Davis: (15:42)
I'll have to say, so Marcos, at Emory, Peds is its own shared service model.

Marcos Garza: (15:51)
So, this is just a Marcos' opinion. That's fine.

Francine Davis: (15:52)
Yes. For the exact same reasons that you've described, some of the units are so nuanced, and everything is a little bit different. And so, trying to create that level of consistency across different units, across schools, the work is different just by nature of the type of department. One of the things I know that we struggled with in the beginning was that the department's feeling like they were losing control, so to speak, of their staff and these services.

Tracey Volz: (16:22)
100%.

Francine Davis: (16:22)
That was a huge deal. And we had a lot of opposition in the beginning from departments, from faculty, there were activities that were pulled out because our models are basically for sponsored research. So, anything that was happening on the fiscal side or non-sponsored did not get pulled into our shared service model. And so, that created this environment of orphaned activities. And I use that term because we've been in this model more than 10 years and I still hear that term now. And so, there was this whole feeling of you're taking away my person, and who's going to support me in the department at this level, and how is this going to be structured now? And so that I think in the beginning was one of the bigger challenges, along with trying to make sure that the models were staffed appropriately. But we had some faculty that were very anti... Tracey, your word pod, because that was one of the words that they came up with initially.

Tracey Volz: (17:26)
Oh yeah. Yeah.

Francine Davis: (17:26)
But they veered away from that and they went with another... It's referred to now as a research administration service. And so, there's all these research administration service models that are across the university. But it was not received as well as I think was anticipated that it would be received, and there were some bumps in the road,

but I think we have come much further along the line than when we first started, that's for sure.

Tracey Volz: (17:57)
Oh, our teams now, they're like, okay, we won't say pod anymore. So, we've shifted, I've tried to rebrand it a bit to integrated services. Because also we've probably been maybe a little bit too ambitious because some of those orphaned activities we have taken on. So, we have some departments where the non-grant finances are also part of that, and it really depends. I think in the beginning when standardization is part of your value proposition, it's tough to not apply that across the board so that there can be that continued identity of a clinical department or a translational department, or the size and scale of different departments, and every department and faculty is a different phenotype. And I think we've learned over the past five years and we're still learning how it works and how to do that. But integrated was a really big piece of it because it really is a thought partner within the department for all of this, and then the training and the standardization is a big piece of it. But yeah, it's been fun.

Stefanie Keto: (19:04)
Yeah. And Marcos brings up a good point where he was saying that things need to be reevaluated and changed. And anytime you implement a workflow or process, continuous improvement needs to be on the table. So, what do y'all do to make sure that that happens? Are there evaluations? Do you do surveys? What tools are you using to make sure that there's continuous improvement in these service models?

Francine Davis: (19:31)
I can start with that one since we're in the middle of it right now. So, over the years, there's been a significant amount of strategy. So, in the beginning it was more of surveys and faculty type surveys, how do you feel about the service that you're getting? They were doing benchmarking with other institutions that had gone to some sort of shared service model. We would get a lot of information from our central offices about where we were in the stream of time in terms of faculty satisfaction. And also over the years they'd had consulting firms come in to do an analysis of, are these models working? And it wasn't just the shared service model, but they were looking at things across all of our central offices, and just structurally how things are working. And we're right now, again, in the middle of another one of these initiatives where they're doing another reassessment of, are these models that we're in now really working as efficiently as they can?

(20:35)
Where can we eliminate some of the redundancies across the different areas? So, they do this periodically every few years in the time that we've been in this model and I've been at Emory, I think this is maybe the fifth time that they've looked at our structure across the board. And so, every time someone comes in externally and they make assessments or they make recommendations, then depending on who the leadership is, typically they'll pick and choose what needs to be implemented, and how quickly that needs to happen, and what the impact is to not just the staff, but of course they're very concerned with faculty, the service that we're providing to the faculty. So, they do a, I'd say, decent job of bringing in folks for assessments.

Marcos Garza: (21:25)
Yeah. In the Miller School of Medicine at Miami, well, we have a quarterly metric, so how many proposals did we submit, how many awards? And of course we compare that to the departments that aren't in the model, and generally on a per unit basis, we're doing a lot more. But the other thing we do is an annual customer satisfaction survey that goes out, and there's also a comment box that they have and you hear some really great things and you hear some things that you need to work on. And I would also say that it really reminded me of that old, that I think we've probably all learned over our careers, of everyone loves you when you're in pre-award, and then when you're in post-award, everyone is [inaudible 00:22:13]-

Tracey Volz: (22:12)
It's so true. Why is that always true? It's so true.

Marcos Garza: (22:14)
It's always true, because in the year when we sent out the survey in a more generic format, we were like, okay, we are okay, but nobody's thrilled with us, and then when we really broke it up between pre-award and post-award, we felt like, oh, okay, everybody loves us on our pre-award stuff, it's the post-award. Well, why people say you can't spend something or you're out of money or things like that. And it was a lesson learned by, okay, the survey design, which was really important there because making sure we distinguish between those two types of work because people have very different viewpoints.

Tracey Volz: (22:46)
We're similar, I feel like we're in the middle of, Marcos and Francine, where you guys are. So, we also do surveys, but so we're a little bit maybe unique. So, SRO encaptures all of the central offices as well as the integrated services. And so, what we found, and we're now in our fifth year of the customer service or customer feedback surveys that we do, is not having too many acronyms. And so, we've been going and doing the surveys by stage, so proposal preparation, proposal review and submission, things like that. We had a faculty panel, we

have an annual career administrator day, Marcos, and what I learned from there in a pre and post-award, I think there's just so much more attention that you have for faculty and PIs when it's pre-award.

(23:38)
And post-award, I asked this very direct question and a lot of our panel... And I know the panel really well. They're like, "Yeah, post-award, it is really important, but we don't..." It was almost they just don't pay attention as much to it. So, yeah. But we do surveys, and again, we've tweaked it every year just to help with...

(24:03)
We've tweaked it every year just to help with the feedback and what is an option, what's multiple choice and what's ratings versus what's an open comment. We've learned a lot from that, but that's how we do. We also do really intentional outreach directly to departmental leaders. So faculty, chairs and vice chairs, we'll reach out to them, either myself or the director of SPA or research finance, and then faculty meetings as well. So we have a lot of different forums to get anecdotal feedback, and then we use our surveys as the formal piece of it. But we went from C students to A students, so hopefully that's good.

Stefanie Keto: (24:45)
So now when you're looking at obviously that side, then we have to switch to the other side. So your leadership, you all kind of touched upon on your leadership. And do they expect certain outcomes from these service share models or return on investment? Are they expecting certain things every year or from these feedback responses that you're getting?

Francine Davis: (25:10)
I'd say yes.

Tracey Volz: (25:12)
Clearly, right?

Francine Davis: (25:14)
Yes. Yeah, they are. I think at the highest level of leadership, typically they want to see improvements with efficiency. Is the model cost-effective? Are we providing quality service? Are we compliant? Things across the board. And what's challenging about that is that in these models, because the schools are different, sometimes the level of staffing is different, and so that service may be a little bit different. The level of expertise may be a little bit different in terms of the research administrators. That doesn't change really their expectations in terms of what they would like to see happen.

(25:52)
And so that's one of the reasons. I think we do something similar, as UM and where Tracey is, where they do these surveys internally. For our school of medicine, they'll have specific surveys that may not come from the university that they'll reach into some kind of faculty outreach. And based on that, that will allow them to guide maybe where they need to tweak staffing in certain areas. Is it an imbalance, so to speak, where you have more staff in one shared service model than in another area, in another part of our school of medicine?

(26:29)
So their expectations I believe are consistent across the board in terms of what they would like to see happen. And sometimes there are budgetary constraints too that affect some of the decisions that can be made. And so in research administration, I feel like folks are always tapped in general in terms of workload. But our senior leadership, I think they really do have a vested interest in making sure that things are as efficient as they possibly can. And the leadership that we have now, we've had some shifts over the last few years. And so the leadership that's there now, and all of them have in the past, I should say, are really trying to make strides to make sure that the expectations that they have, those things are fulfilled.

Tracey Volz: (27:17)
So our fiscal year is on the academic year, so September, August. And so in September I am reporting on, this is across again everything, so not just shared services, but very similar to Fran. So when I report, I'll give a year-over-year comparisons of what's our customer feedback. We do have benchmarks internally. So for a lot of the parity of the workload distribution, we call it load balancing across the staff. We use that across the institution.

(27:48)
So we are hybrid. We have a handful of departments who are not fully integrated, but even whenever we're launching a different resource or otherwise, we include everybody across the board so that hopefully we're, again, more of a friendly than infiltrator, I guess. But the efficiencies we also track, we're leaning in a lot into tech, AI, RPA, things like that, not because there is no need for research administrators, but there is a lot of tasks that people don't need to do. And hopefully because we're all strapped, we can actually, again, adjust the workload accordingly.

(28:28)
So we do give some of the metrics and part of the evaluation is also the hours that we've saved or if that results in a headcount savings. For us, a lot of times the headcount is a shift to where people are able to move and be a bench across different areas rather than any cutting of staff. But efficiencies are always looked into it as well.

Marcos Garza: (28:53)
Yeah. I think with our leadership, we're always very focused on relative to the old model of everyone having their own person. But also we want to highlight our successes to leadership. We made a goal that we would bring when we were recruiting PIs and transferring them here, that we would bring their grant over within six months. And if you start October 1st then six months later, your grant is here in Reporter, we can see it as ours. And we like to highlight those successes of we're able to accomplish that because of this shared service model and requiring a standard of excellence from the administrators in that model.

(29:38)
And I'd be curious to hear from the others what they have, how their staff, but we're more of a flat model. So I have a director and then managers pretty much. And those managers are folks who can pretty much just throw anything out, whether it's a clinical trial or a big training grant or a standard R01 or some little foundation, and you can pretty much throw anything at them. I don't really have any tiers under them. It's a small but mighty number.

Tracey Volz: (30:11)
I think a lot of our feedback also ... Sorry, is just-

Francine Davis: (30:15)
Oh, no, go ahead.

Tracey Volz: (30:16)
If leadership hears good things, word of mouth is so important. And so yes, the surveys, yes, all the data, yes, our successes, but it's also if they're not hearing, "Oh, the POD," or "Oh this ..." I think that's also helpful. And so we also just try to, again, just focus on the good partnership and I do check-ins with the administrators and things like that because I think that's usually ... We're administrators, so hopefully we're not the gnats buzzing around people's ears. We want to also just make sure that we're reaching out directly so that we can prevent some of those anecdotal perceptions going out there because word of mouth is power.

Francine Davis: (30:57)
I couldn't agree with that more because we always talking about they all talk. I always hear this, "Does your person do this? My person does this." And so sometimes it gets a little bit challenging because there are specific duties that we have. And sometimes you have to go a bit above and beyond depending on what the ask is, which is totally okay. But sometimes you do have team members where they'll go way beyond and then the other team members like, "We're not supposed to do that." And so to what you were saying, Tracey, even in that model, because you have people doing the same work, if for

some reason we switch analysts and that one analyst is the extra mile person and the other analyst is not, and you know what I mean? That's where it can create some of that buzz, you know what I mean? And to what you're saying, you're like, if you don't hear anything, that's usually a good thing. Typically, it's only when there's some kind of escalation or issue.

(31:58)
But we do have some faculty that are really good. We have in our email signature lines, there is a link for faculty feedback. So if they want to provide feedback about the service that they're getting from that model, they can do that at any time. And we do have some faculty that actually do take the time to put something really nice or encouraging that goes to our SVPR. So I think that at least that piece of it is so encouraging. But to what you were saying, yeah, they chat pretty frequently about stuff.

Stefanie Keto: (32:31)
I was always told that one happy person will tell one happy person, but one angry person will tell 10 or 20, and it just spreads like wildfire.

Francine Davis: (32:41)
So true.

Tracey Volz: (32:42)
And we all do it, for whatever reason. The whole, it takes more muscles to frown than to smile, but it seems a lot easier for us to complain than it does for us to praise. So whatever that means.

Stefanie Keto: (32:55)
Yeah. So if you're listening and you have something good to say about your administrator, please share it with their supervisor.

Francine Davis: (33:01)
Absolutely. I share it with mine.

Tracey Volz: (33:05)
We have a whole shout out board. Yeah.

Marcos Garza: (33:10)
Under me, I have our clinical research operations as well and research space management and all these other things. And I've told all my directors who report to me, this isn't always a perfect judgment, but by the number of complaints I get is how I'm judging how well you're doing because I'm moving a lot of things and a lot of things are constantly evolving. So if it's radio silence from any faculty member, I'm like, "Okay, well, everything must be running well." We

have metrics and surveys and all these other things that we check in on, but if I'm not getting complaints, so we're doing well.

Stefanie Keto: (33:50)
So the last question I have for y'all would be, what lessons have you learned, or if anything, what would you do differently if you were starting this again? Because obviously we might have some people who are looking at maybe doing this. So what would you do differently or what have you learned?

Francine Davis: (34:07)
Who wants to go first for that one?

Tracey Volz: (34:13)
Still learning over here.

Marcos Garza: (34:13)
Yeah, so I'm still learning too. So I would say those, we call them MOUs, but for all intents and purposes, they're service level agreements of having the roles and responsibilities between the department and the research administration unit, whatever you're calling it, POD or RDS or RAS is really important because particularly if you're in a medical school and you have clinical departments, a lot of your clinical administrators are like, "Okay, well I've hired someone to take care of that and they'll do it all." And it's like, "Well, no, no, ultimately the departmental budget is still your responsibility and everything like that."

(34:53)
So we have to be very clear on who's on first, who's on second, who's on third type of things for certain things, particularly for the post-award components of it. For pre-award, we can take most of everything pretty much with the exception of the PI's responsibilities. I think those service level agreements are so important, making sure that they're really well articulated and that you're very clear. I use my training grant example as I said training grants and in my head that just meant one thing, but to everyone else, they heard that a different way. And so we had to walk that back a little bit. And I think being very explicit about we help with this, but not with that.

Francine Davis: (35:32)
I think from my perspective, one of the biggest lessons since the inception of our model was where the focus is on organizational change rather than structure. I think that if you put a bunch of people in a structure, that's just a new structure, but there's so many other things that govern how that structure works. And looking back on it now, the leadership that was there at the time I think had a different set of focus when we were implementing-

(36:03)
I think had a different set of focus when we were implementing the model. But I think if we had to go back in time and do it a little bit differently, maybe a different set of stakeholder engagement prior to implementation in terms of the vision, and then looking at standardizing the processes versus centralizing them at that point. And then we did have a pilot model at the time before all of the units, they phased the units out, which I thought was great. And we had a pilot model of two units in two different schools to see how that would work. And then the rest of the models joined in the next, I think it was another year or so after that. But if the processes I think that everybody was doing was a bit more standardized at the time, it could have created more successes earlier on.

(36:51)
And I feel like we're still learning. Even though we've been in the structure for a long period of time, I feel like the model itself, it still continues to evolve because they want to make sure that we improve efficiencies and make sure faculty are just getting the service that they need. You need pre-award support, you need good pre and post-award support. So having those processes and having appropriate systems to be able to do the work where there's not as many touch points, I think is so critical to the success of the structure. So if we had just the change management piece of it that flows down to the structure, I think that's a big lesson learned from my perspective.

Tracey Volz: (37:33)
Yeah, I would definitely echo that. I think part of where we have found so much more success, and again, we are continuing to do this in our fifth year, but so much growth in that short amount of time, is emphasizing the partnership piece of it. There's department administrators and then there's central administration. We're all part of the same administration, whether or not people agree with that or see that, it truly is the same administration.

Francine Davis: (37:58)
Absolutely.

Tracey Volz: (37:59)
And there certainly are different perspectives, but they shouldn't be counter to each other. And so I think starting I think from that premise, and because it was a pilot, we tried very much to be like, do this on the side, we'll give ourselves time to grow, et cetera. My goodness was that so optimistic because it just did not happen. But I think being really transparent around, like you were saying, Fran, of the organizational change and concept around it rather than the structure, because will the structure and the reporting change? Yes. Will things change? Yes. But the hope is that the change evolves and

in this partnership, we're able to improve the overall process experience, development, learning, et cetera, together.

(38:47)
And I think breaking down the fact that it's like this us versus them, which is very just inherently common in research administration, I think is something that we're continuing to learn through. But if I could start it again five years ago, it would've been much more intentional on that because we grew too fast and we weren't prepared for it. And the value propositions were there, but it was like, okay, so what's the answer to this? And then people were ready to do it. It was like, "Okay, give me a minute. Sorry, one second." It's like I only have enough sandwiches to feed 20, not 50.

Stefanie Keto: (39:24)
Well, it does sound like even though there might have been bumps along the road and growing pains obviously because it changed, obviously as Marcus illuminated earlier where there's some people who want to do it and some people who don't, and then some people you probably have to force to do it potentially. But it sounds like all around it's all pretty well going for everybody. It's smooth sailing and it seems like a growth of 4 departments to 28, that's a pretty big growth in 5 years. So I think it's been beneficial, hopefully for your institutions.

Tracey Volz: (40:04)
I think it's been beneficial. I mean, smooth sailing, there's always a storm every now and then.

Stefanie Keto: (40:08)
[inaudible 00:40:10].

Tracey Volz: (40:10)
But I think from a central perspective, what I said a year later and now five years later, it really is so important to have that departmental perspective into just the overall research administrative processes. And when I oversaw just the post award office or the pre-award office, you always think from a central perspective, you're like, "Oh, we'll give them this tool. It'll be amazing." And if you don't include the department and the people on the other end, it just doesn't work. And so, this model really enabled us to do that and to bring a voice for the departments, which I hope has been a big part of the success.

Marcos Garza: (40:45)
I think for us it's going really well. And I think part of that is over the years, shared services have been tried and not successful and stuff, but I think we've found the way to move forward with making it a better service for everyone, something that they want to use. I also

think the fact that we're more remote now than ever has helped that you don't need to physically be there as much anymore, so that's certainly helped. And I also have always, in that partnership with that department, I've emphasized to our leadership that just because they don't have a position anymore, some of that sponsor programs work that was happening is now happening in a shared service model, but all those other ancillary things that they were doing probably still need to get done.

(41:36)
So they need to work through their own model of who does this? Is it the admin manager? Is it a coordinator? Because there are certain things that are still needing to get done in the department that aren't really pre or post-award administration. And when you have the sponsor programs, people embedded, they're like, "Oh okay, we'll ask them to do it and they'll do it." And you get a varying level of functionality there as well saying.

Francine Davis: (42:06)
I'll say too that I base the success of the models based on the end result of how much funding is coming in because those things have to be submitted and managed if you receive funding and not just across our shared service models, but across all of our offices collectively. So to me, if you're a R01 institution and you hit that billion dollar mark, somebody's doing something correctly. So that includes everybody, our faculty, all of the folks in research administration, everybody that touches the life cycle of an award to me contributes to the success of the structure. And I feel like it's not really a one time project, it's just kind of ongoing journey. So there's always going to be bumps in the road. There's nothing that's going to be perfect, but it's going to always require some continuous evaluation and adaptation and lots of collaboration.

Tracey Volz: (43:04)
Especially now because things change. They always change, but the past 18 months, it's been a little bit more disruption there.

Stefanie Keto: (43:14)
Disruption.

Tracey Volz: (43:15)
Just a little.

Stefanie Keto: (43:17)
Just a little. Well, I would like to thank you all, Marcos, Francine, Tracey for coming and joining us on Shop Talk today. This has been a great opportunity to share your honest opinions of your shared service models. I've really enjoyed the conversation.

Tracey Volz: (43:32)
Thank you so much.

Marcos Garza: (43:33)
Thank you.

Francine Davis: (43:33)
Thank you so much. This was awesome.

Stefanie Keto: (43:36)
Thank you all for listening and thank you to our panel, Marcos Garza, Tracey Volz, and Francine Davis for giving us such an honest look at the real world implementation and evolution of shared services. It was insightful to discuss how initial naming conventions like calling your team pods can shape how these models are perceived from day one. We also gained great perspective on how selling the launch as a VIP package impacted initial campus buy-in. Additionally, you all provided wonderful tips for how you navigated encouraging campus adoption at your institutions while continually refining your workflows for ongoing improvement. We truly appreciate you joining us and sharing your time and expertise with the Shop Talk community.

(44:28)
A huge thank you as always to our wonderful podcast team and everyone who continually contributes to enhancing this podcast. We are proud that this platform brings together people, ideas, and new opportunities in research administration. The conversation doesn't stop here. We would love to hear from you. Please submit your suggestions for future episodes of SRAI Shop Talk to shoptalk@srai.org. Thank you again for listening to this episode. Don't forget to subscribe and help grow our community by sharing. I'm Stefanie Keto and I'll catch you on the next episode.