

RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION ADVISORY COUNCIL (RAAC)
1 p.m. on Monday, February 7, 2022
via Zoom

Present:

Jeremy Alajajian	Elaine Jacobs	April Schenck
Darlene Booker	Caroline Kennedy	Nikki Simmons
Vikki Cherwon	Stacy Leotta	Peter Szanton
Valerie Crickard	Sherry Loyd	Mary Welsh
Jacob Falkiewicz	Angelica Martins	Shanda Wirt
Stafford Farmer	Laura Moody	

Absent:

Juandra Burris	Carl Mahler
Rachel Ladenheim	Stephanie Sanchez-Esparragoza

Meeting Opening:

I. Welcome new RAAC members:

- Juandra Burris, Business Officer, Undergraduate Education
- Jacob Falkiewicz, Associate Director, Contracts & Grants Office, College of Engineering
- Caroline Kennedy, Research Officer, College of Computing & Informatics Research Office
- Laura Moody, Assistant Director for Cost Analysis & Cash Management, Grants & Contracts Administration, Research and Economic Development

II. Approval of meeting minutes for 12/6/21 RAAC meeting

Darlene Booker moved that the minutes be accepted as submitted; the motion was seconded by Stacy Leotta and passed without objection.

Old Business:

III. Update on Niner Research Sponsored Awards Reporting

Peter Szanton reported that a major effort was made to complete entry of award data immediately after the winter holiday break. Some reports have already been created, especially the key reports that are needed by GCA, but several Associate Deans have requested types of reports are not yet on the list of pre-defined reports that will be created for Niner Research. About nine months previously, Ellen Zavala had created a list of all the reports that were then available in NORM and asked for the college research officers to identify the ones that they used most commonly. ORS will again send out a Google sheet listing those reports and also asking that the college research officers to identify the ten reports that they need most urgently. ORS intends to duplicate in Niner Research virtually all of the reports that were used in NORM, but the responses to the Google sheet will be used to prioritize the creation of the remaining reports. The college research officers will also be asked to list up to three new types of reports that they would like to see be created; it is possible that the OneIT group may need to be involved to create those new reports. Mr. Szanton noted that this is a stopgap effort until a larger reporting suite is available. Dr. Tankersley noted that the reporting system

within Niner Research is not particularly responsive (i.e., it frequently times out before completing a report) and that the University is in discussions with InfoEd to address some the challenges that may be encountered when running a search on the Niner Research. He also announced that in the coming week a Google sheet will be released containing data on all proposals submitted and awards received to date in FY2022; this sheet will give the associate deans and research officers the ability to find information on proposals and awards at the college and departmental levels. This sheet will be updated weekly, but will only include data for this fiscal year rather than historical data. This is a short-term solution. In the longer term, OneIT is assessing the possibility of downloading information from Niner Research in real time via an existing API so that a separate tool can be built for generating reports. Creating that tool will require several months, but the final result should be a much more responsive system than the reporting module currently in Niner Research. RAAC members will see a short-term solution (the Google sheets that will be updated weekly), a medium-term solution (reports that are made using the Niner Research reporting function), and a long-term solution (the new reporting tool to be created by OneIT that will improve both system responsiveness and flexibility). Eventually a fourth tool will be created that will take information from Niner Research, Banner, and other data libraries to create dashboards and to display additional metrics such as expenditure by faculty members within specific departments. The functionality of this new tool has been identified by the Top Tier Commission as being important for ongoing monitoring of research. Dr. Tankersley hopes to have all four of these tools up and running by midsummer. Valerie Crickard asked if the new reports that ORS is asking research offices to describe would be limited to information to information from Niner Research's Proposal Development module through the Award Tracking modules; Mr. Szanton said that this is what ORS currently envisions but that if the college research officers request reports that would require additional data then he will forward those requests to Dr. Tankersley and the OneIT personnel who are creating new tools. Stacy Leotta mentioned that she was unable to find the currently existing reports that are available for use in Niner Research and asked if they were available to everyone in RAAC; Stafford Farmer indicated that these reports should be available and Mr. Szanton recommended sending an email to the Niner Research support group to determine whether there is a technical issue preventing Ms. Leotta from finding them. Dr. Tankersley emphasized that RED recognizes the difficulties currently experienced in getting information out of Niner Research and resolving these difficulties is a high priority for him and his staff.

New Business:

IV. Niner Research Change Request eForms

Darlene Booker reported that Change Requests that require prior approvals before being submitted to external agencies will be made exclusively via the Change Request eForm starting on February 14 but that Change Requests can continue to be submitted via email or other means until then. A technical glitch has been experienced with the Change Request eForm in that if the eForm is routed to someone who has changed departments or is no longer in his or her previous position then the routing process may stop altogether. Ms. Booker expects this glitch to be corrected in the very near future. However, it is possible that the person submitting an eForm may need to send the form directly to whoever needs to approve it. Valerie Crickard noted that there are now two individuals

within OneIT who assist in correcting issues such as this once they have been discovered. Shanda Wirt noted that before submitting an eForm in Niner Research's Proposal Development module, the user is shown the current routing; she asked if the users are given the same functionality for the Change Request eForm so that they can correct errors that they may see in routing. Ms. Booker noted that the users currently do not have that capability and that the module administrators would need to make such changes. Jacob Falkiewicz noted that the routing information is not presented to the user before the eForm is submitted, but that the information is populated after submission. Ms. Crickard and Ms. Booker will check to see whether changes can be made so as to present the routing information to the user prior to submission. Ms. Wirt noted that the Proposal Development module presents this information to the user prior to submission and that this capability would allow the user to avoid problems with the Change Request eForm by contacting the module administrator if the user notices an error in the routing of the eForm.

V. Fund Setup Subprojects

Ms. Crickard reported that the fund setup process is being changed from being performed by Perceptive Content to being done by Niner Research, which creates new fund numbers in Banner. This has been completed for the original fund setup and is now being implemented for sub-funds. There are still some "hiccups" but this should not impact the college research officers as the older system for creating sub-funds is currently being used. When the new process is implemented in the coming months the budget will be pulled through Niner Research into Banner to create the sub-funds. The individuals creating the proposal budgets will be responsible for ensuring that the budgets are created in such a manner as to create the subfunds in Banner correctly; this requires using the appropriate budget account codes. When the system is being tested GCA may request help from the college research officers to ensure that it works properly, and particularly to ensure that notifications are made appropriately to the PIs. Dr. Tankersley noted that the timeframe for implementing this new process is likely to extend into April and that the current process for fund and sub-fund setup will continue until then.

VI. Release Time, ePAFS, PD7s - that are impacted by the recent raises

GCA is currently required to hold all Release Time forms until the end of February. At that time all merit raises will go into effect for annual salaries (institution base salaries or "IBS"). The Release Time forms will then be processed. For Release Time forms that were submitted prior to December 31, the UNC System budget office made an automatic adjustment for the 2.5% raise that was implemented. Release Time is based on a lump sum amount, but salary increases are handled by the Budget Office as percentage increases for each pay period; this means that Release Time must be handled by GCA using a "PC2" form to handle the individual percentage increase for each pay period so as to reflect the lump sum value of the Release Time. The PC2 form is then provided to the Budget Office. GCA was incorrectly informed that Release Time would not be affected by the salary increase and that the system would automatically correct for release time. This affects the funds provided to the individual Colleges for personnel costs. GCA can go back and correct the resulting errors but is not going to do that in all cases because some Colleges have the ability to absorb these errors. The Colleges need to identify to GCA any Release Time forms that need to be recalculated to reflect the new salary. GCA will provide a list to each of the Colleges that identify the Release Time forms that are currently being held. Ms. Crickard asked the research

administrators to review these expeditiously in order to allow any needed changes to be made soon – this will impact invoicing and financial projections as well as grants that are closing. Vikki Cherwon requested that GCA send the research administrators an email telling them exactly what needs to be done and Ms. Crickard agreed to do so. Ms. Crickard indicated that GCA is currently holding at least 50 Release Time forms. Dr. Tankersley noted that this has been a problem throughout the UNC system. There may be situations in which a position becomes open and filling it may not be allowable in order to cover funds needed as a result of the salary increases. For awards that do not expire until the summer it may be necessary to postpone making commitments in order to cover budget shortfalls resulting from the salary increases.

Ms. Crickard noted that because raises were retroactive to July 1, 2021 she had been asked if people could have pay be recalculated for summer salary and the answer is a hard no. This would affect effort reporting and such requests would be blocked by Academic Affairs. She also noted that another 2.5% salary increase will go into effect on July 1 and it is important for the research officers to take this into account when processing Release Time forms and when building budgets for proposals with start dates after July 1, 2022. Mr. Szanton noted that on the budget spreadsheet currently in use there is an expectation of a 2.5% increase for each year going forward (although in reality this is likely to change).

VII. Niner Research budget entry requirements for non S2S proposals

Ms. Wirt reviewed the substance of discussions held about two years ago regarding the change from entering total direct and indirect project costs in NORM to the detailed budgets that are now entered into Niner Research. Entering in budgets for projects involving multiple subawards can be very time consuming, with one DOE project requiring 13 hours to input all of the detailed budgets for each subaward. Niner Research cannot currently be used as a budget development tool, so Excel Spreadsheets are still being used for that purpose. Despite the amount of time required for entering detailed budgets into Niner Research, this turns out to save a significant amount of time for System to System (“S2S”) proposals because it eliminates the need to separately enter the same information into the sponsor’s eRA system. Although not currently implemented, eventually the detailed budgets will flow from Niner Research’s AT module directly into Banner, including the detailed subaward budgets and cost share information. However for non-S2S submissions the amount of time required for entering detailed budgets into Niner Research seems to be unwarranted. Ms. Wirt suggests that for non-S2S submissions it would make sense to follow the former practice of only loading Total Direct Costs (“TDC”), Indirect Costs (“IDC”), and Total Project Costs (“TPC”) into Niner Research in the proposal stage and only enter the detailed budgets for the (approximately) 30% of proposals that are actually awarded; the detailed budget would be entered using the Proposal Tracking module by the Research Administrators and this information would then flow to the personnel in GCA who work with the awards. Entering only the TDC, IDC, and TPC information satisfies the requirements for the IPS form and the needs of the department chairs and deans for information on individual proposals.

Peter Szanton voiced some concerns about Ms. Wirt’s proposal. Some reports that he anticipates being made from Niner Research require more detailed information than would be provided by TDC, IDC, and TPC information; specifically, for NSF and NIH “current and pending” support one needs to know the effort reporting numbers, and this requires more detailed information. Similarly, one needs to have the detailed information in order to calculate support for graduate students –

projections of this information can be useful before receiving awards. Mr. Szanton also mentioned that CLAS has been entering detailed budgets for UNC Charlotte's proposed expenses but only putting in total direct charges and total indirect charges for subawards; this saves a significant amount of time at the proposal development stage but provides the information that he expects to be needed in future reports. He asked Ms. Crickard whether GCA needs the detailed breakdown of the subaward budgets and Ms. Crickard responded that Banner has two account codes for subawards, one for the first \$25,000 and the other for funds in excess of that amount. She indicated that Ms. Wirt's proposal would provide all the information that is needed by GCA. Stafford Farmer noted that implementation of Mr. Szanton's proposal would only allow reporting of TDC, IDC, and F&A rates for subawards in the future, but this might be sufficient for all purposes. Ms. Leotta noted that there is a separate area for data entry that specifies the total FTE for graduate students and she asked whether that would be sufficient. Mr. Szanton replied that in the past not only had people asked for reports on graduate students FTE but also on graduate student financial support, and more detailed information would have to be entered into Niner Research if those reports were desired. This means that things such as average stipends per FTE could not be generated without the additional data; this information may be less important going forward now that standard graduate student support packages are being developed for the various programs on campus.

Dr. Tankersley suggested that consideration be given to the information provided by Ms. Wirt and Mr. Szanton and that any decision be postponed for the present. He also noted that the types of reports mentioned by Mr. Szanton would possibly only be needed for actual awards rather than for proposals, so that postponing entry of some detailed budgets until awards are made might be the most efficient way to move forward. He recommended looking at the individual fields in the various Niner Research modules to see what information might not be collected under various data entry scenarios so as to enable consideration of what type of reporting could be possible at various stages of proposal development and submission. This question will be revisited at the March RAAC meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Carl Mahler