Challenges & Strategies: Workload Management & Organization

Research Advancement Seminar
Top 10 RA Challenges

1. Urgent surprises
2. Interruptions
3. Bride mentality
4. Heavy deadlines
5. Delegating
6. Multiple “hats”
7. Staffing
8. Volume of emails
9. Interdisciplinary collaborations
10. Power outages, etc.
Tools & Strategies
To-Do Lists

• Hand-written
• Outlook
  – Inbox
  – Tasks
  – Calendar
  – Folders
• Color coding

• White board(s)
• Excel spreadsheets
• Notebook with tabs
• Print-out of Coeus
  Proposal log or Intake Form
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Average: 48,748  Count: 111  Sum: 4,533,584
• Stephanie Sandrock

• Marj Townsend
Tools & Strategies
Strategies

COMMUNICATION
Encourage Communication

• Get the word out to faculty to notify the RA as soon as they think they will be submitting or interested in an funding opportunity.
• Mention this process in new faculty orientation.

• Send monthly email to faculty:
  – Remind them to notify us of upcoming proposals
  – Identify upcoming opportunities (that they typically do or might be interested in)
  – Share vacation schedules
Encourage Communication

• “I send an email to the school Director in mid-March asking him to share an email “that I drafted” to all his faculty which basically states if you “think” you “might” apply to the upcoming DOJ deadlines please send email to…… with either the program number or link you are wishing to apply to.”
Communicate Deadlines

- For heavy deadlines: have an absolute deadline for budget for everyone. Accelerate deadlines 2 business days from the usual timeline.

- Send email or talk 1:1 to address missed internal deadlines
Manage Expectations

- Write back: I'm busy but will respond tomorrow.
- “How soon do you need an answer?”
- Explain that (for less time sensitive projects) I need a bit more time in order to prioritize by deadline, etc.
- 24-hour turnaround to answer every email - let them know we're looking into it.
- Checking email @ night.
- Shared email: team cover group box in shifts.
Strategies

TIME MANAGEMENT
“Eat a live frog first thing in the morning and nothing worse will happen to you the rest of the day.”

-Mark Twain
Be Proactive

• As soon as PI’s express interest - Pull the FA’s, read through them, fill in the standard ASU info for each set of sponsor forms, gather the F&A rate agreement and other items that an RA would need to supply for the proposal, start the IB, start the BU.

• Cycle through each proposal every day – make sure any action I can take has been executed.
Manage Interruptions

Set it aside…
• Put new, lower-priority requests on a to-do list and keep focusing on the task at hand.

Knock it out…
• If it can be taken care of easily in a few minutes, get it done.
Strategies

HANDLING STRESS
Come in a little early
Set a threshold of how many proposals due in one day is too many-have a plan in place for getting help with “overflow.”

Working on special projects for process improvement, etc. can help diffuse tension and bring variety to our workloads.

Find a place to start – just do 1 thing and finish that (correctly) then move on to the next thing.

Look at the bigger picture. Perspective.

Take a break. Take an evening off. Take a vacation. Go get coffee, take a walk, chat with a colleague, get a change of scenery.

Look at the bigger picture. Perspective.

Music helps me focus. Helps me feel good. Brushes out the negative. ♫

Humor is the best antidote.

Zone in for 30 minutes and check something off the list.

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Zone in for 30 minutes and check something off the list.
Hey girl.

You know all those subrecipient budgets you specifically asked to be sent on the sponsor’s template, but none were done correctly?

Don’t worry. I’ve transferred them all to the proper form and fixed their errors.

I also built the subs’ costs into your spreadsheet and completed the sponsor form for ASU’s budget.

Now you can leave on time and we can have that glass of wine together.
What are the challenges or obstacles you have experienced in striving to be organized and on top of things?

How do you keep projects/tasks from slipping through the cracks?

What are your strategies or tools for managing a heavy workload (i.e. a high volume of proposals or demanding award management responsibilities)?
  - Do you have any strategies/tools that you use specifically for when you have a million proposals due for the same deadline?

How do you remain productive when you’re feeling overwhelmed?

How do you avoid getting spread too thin?