Funding Mayhem

Outline

• Research Services Office (RSO)
• Research Relationships – from an Administrative Perspective
• Policies and Procedures
• Some Interactive Exercises – Developing and submitting proposals, Finalizing Funding Documentation, and Managing Funding
• Final Take Home Messages

Please feel free to ask questions as they come up. We’ll be asking you some along the way.
Research Services Office (RSO) supports researchers and administrators by helping the U of A research community find, apply for, receive and manage research funding ($).

Q - How much research $ comes to the U of A on an annual basis?
Some Research Funding Facts

• Total research funding received in 2016-17 was ~$513M*
• Funding was received from over 773 sponsors
• Research funding represented ~27% of the yearly total revenue brought into the University in 2016-17

* includes external grants, donations, and internal funds designated for research-related spending
PI - a researcher who is primarily responsible for the intellectual contribution to the research proposal, application, agreement, contract or award and is responsible for the overall direction of research activities of the research project. As the PI you are responsible for managing the funding tied to your project in accordance with U of A policy and the terms of the award as outlined by the sponsor (organization providing the funding).
Research Policies and Procedures

UAPPOL:
https://policiesonline.ualberta.ca/PoliciesProcedures/Pages/default.aspx

Research policies include: Patent Policy, Conflict Policy, Animal/Human Research Ethics policies, Distribution of Royalty Revenue Policy, Contract Review and Signing Authority Policy, Eligibility to Apply for and Hold Research Funding Policy, Research and Scholarly Integrity Policy, Research Policy

Note: Copyright is covered in various academic staff agreements
Some Interactive Exercises
Exercise #1 – Applying for Funding

A post doc and her supervisor are applying for funds from the Cat Scratch Lollipop Foundation. According to the funding call, applications are due Monday February 7th at 12 noon and they require an institutional signature. The application is dropped off at the Research Services Office at 3:00 pm on the Friday immediately proceeding the deadline. The post doc leaves her cell number with the front desk, but indicates she is going out of town and likely won’t be available until later in the morning on Monday.

Q – What potential problems do you see with this situation?
In reviewing the application the Research Services Office notices the following:

• The post doc is listed as the applicant with no reference to her supervisor
• No one has signed off on the application other than the post doc
• Budget does not include indirect costs or adhere to sponsor guidelines
• There are sections of the application missing
• Application is actually due at noon EST on Monday
• Application has to be delivered to the sponsor as an originally signed hard copy
The student is listed as the applicant with no reference to her supervisor

Eligibility to Apply for and Hold Research Funding Policy

• Purpose of Policy: To define who is eligible to apply for research funding and hold research projects at the University of Alberta.

• The policy states that students can apply “as co-applicant or as a principal applicant for graduate student stipend award”
No one has signed off on the application other than the student

Research Policy, Research Administration Roles and Responsibilities Procedure

• This procedure sets out the primary responsibilities of the major parties involved in research administration at the University of Alberta.

• One of the subsection states it’s the Principal Investigator (= lead applicants) responsibility to prepare applications that include the signatures of all University co-applicants and the Department, Faculty and RSO.

• RSO is unable to sign until the other signatures are in place.
Budget requirements from both a sponsor and institutional perspective

- Amount requested exceeds maximum amount allowed
- Budget includes ineligible expenses
- This is a matching funds program – no external matching funds included in budget
- Budget is very difficult to follow/interpret – hard to tell what individual is asking for and why
- Budget justification doesn’t match/support the numbers in the budget table
- There are calculation errors
- Internal (i.e. institutional) support listed in budget table, but no confirmation of support provided
- Budget doesn’t include indirect costs of research
Budget does not include indirect costs


• This procedure states the University of Alberta’s position with respect to the recovery of indirect costs for all research funding except tri-agency funds.
• Indirect costs will be deducted from research funds received, except in those instances where a sponsor’s formally established research policy expressly prohibits or limits their recovery.
• Researchers must apply for 20% indirect costs relative to the total cost of the research agreement with the exception of tri-agency grants.
Sections of the application missing, application is due at noon EST and has to be received in hard copy

• The RSO deadline is five business days before the sponsor deadline
  • Five working days provides the RSO with enough time to enter the application information into the Grants system, review the application package, discuss recommended changes, receive revisions, sign the application on behalf of the University, and return it to the researcher for submission to the sponsor.
  • Department and faculty offices have their own internal processes and deadlines for obtaining signatures.
• It is the applicant’s responsibility to make any necessary revisions and submit the applications to the sponsors in advance of the deadline.
Dr. Drawer and one of his students are at a conference where they meet a representative from a company that is interested in Dr. Drawer’s research. The company agrees to provide Dr. Drawer with $100K to support the 2-year research project that the student is working on for their thesis. The company sends Dr. Drawer a legal agreement outlining the terms and conditions of the funding and a cheque for $100K. Dr. Drawer signs off on the agreement and sends a PDF copy of the agreement back to the company and places the original with the cheque in his desk drawer. The student is anxious to get started on the project and commences the work. Although the funding includes money to support the graduate student’s salary the student is currently being paid through a teaching assistantship so there is no immediate rush to get access to the funds from the company until later on in the project.

Q What issues do you see with this scenario?
Some additional Information

• The student’s teaching assistantship ends after the first year of the project and the student now needs to get paid from the company funds.
• Dr. Drawer approaches the Research Services Office asking about where his funding is.
• A review of the agreement by the Research Services Office (once they received the agreement) noted the following:
  • Research results will be the property of the company
  • The University will have no rights to utilize or publish the results
  • The name of the company is to be kept confidential
• When asked how Dr. Drawer funded the research that had been conducted to date he indicated that he had used funds from another funding source, which he was hoping to reimburse once he had access to the company funds.
Some key considerations

• The agreement is legally binding. In signing the agreement, Dr. Drawer could be held personally responsible if anything goes wrong.
• One of the purposes of the University in conducting research is the discovery and dissemination of knowledge and policies of the University require that Research Results be capable of publication and disclosure.
  • The University cannot agree to do “secret” research.
• Not being able to disclose name of the company (aka the sponsor) is an issue.
• Sponsor owns research results – affects future use rights
• Graduate students must own the copyright in their thesis.
• Funds from another project were used to fund this work.
• The University was unable to agree to terms in agreement.

Luckily in this situation the company agreed to terminate the agreement without further considerations.
Exercise # 3 – Managing Funding

Dr. Smiley received funding from the Happy Foundation to conduct a study on “The Power of Laughing”. The term of the project is 18 months and the work requires ethics approval. Funds were provided to support 2 graduate students and a postdoc. Any funds remaining at the end of the project were to be returned to the sponsor. The plan was to spend the 1st 10 months developing and conducting interviews and collecting data. The next 4 months transcribing and analyzing the data. The last 4 months would be focused on writing a manuscript and disseminating the findings.
Some additional information

• The project gets off to a late start due to delays in getting the ethics approval.
• The project account ($) is temporarily shut down part way through the project due to the fact that Dr. Smiley accidentally forgot to renew his ethics approval prior to it expiring.
• 2 graduate students were appointed for 18 months to work on the project. The freed up funds were used to purchase a piece of equipment not listed in original budget.
• Dr. Smiley loses track of his spending, but believes he will have funds remaining at the end of the project and decides to buy a laptop that students can use for future research projects. The resultant purchase over-expends the project.

Q – What issues do you see with the above scenario?
Key Considerations

- RSO cannot set up a project and allow spending to begin until Ethics approval is in place.
- Ethics approval have to remain in place for the duration of the project. (renewed when necessary) Otherwise you will lose access to your funding.
- Adhere to sponsor/institutional guidelines/policies for expenses
  - appropriate & reasonable
  - eligible
  - within dates of the award
- Sponsor approval often required for budget changes
- Receipt of funding (payment) tied to Deliverables
- Don’t over-expend. Can be held personally responsible for any over spending.
- Institutional reporting tools to track research revenue/expenditure and for reconciliations
Key Points to Take Away

• Involve Research Office up front – prior to applying for funding
• Respect Institutional deadlines
• Be aware of and understand the terms and conditions of your funding. Publication, use rights, and ownership are three important considerations that warrant extra attention
• Don’t sign off on legal agreements for funds coming to the institution
• Keep timelines realistic – award processing takes time
• Know spending “rules” for your funds (eligible expenditures, deviations from budget, supporting documentation required, etc.)
Key Points to Take Away

• Track and reconcile funds and do not over spend
• PI is not authorized to bind the institution, but can be held personally responsible/financially liable in situations that go badly and this can be costly
• Be aware of end dates of funding and your reporting requirements
• Notify sponsor and/or institution of changes to academic status, significant changes to research program, other changes that may impact terms/conditions of agreement
• “I don’t know” is not an excuse
…..and that’s a wrap. Thank you For Coming

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