Building Resilience by Bringing Research Development and Research Administration Together

SAINT LOUIS UNIVERSITY™

Jasmin Patel, MBA, Assistant Vice President, Research Strategy, Saint Louis University
Alexis Bruce-Staudt, MSW, Executive Director, Grant Operation Centers, Saint Louis University

Abstract

Traditionally, central Research Development (RD) professionals and Research Administration (RA) professionals have significantly different roles and responsibilities. Yet, both RD and RA professionals are faculty-facing positions that can influence the research culture of an institution. At Saint Louis University we have launched an ambitious goal to double our research enterprise in five years. To accelerate progress towards this goal, we are embarking on major organizational changes and re-envisioning the way research is supported on campus.

Background

Through the creation of centralized "Grant Operation (GO) Centers," we are bringing together pre-award, post-award, and research development professionals into the Office of the Vice President for Research. With this new infrastructure, our goal is to offer more specialized and personalized services, ultimately leading to higher quality proposals for funding. The new model creates greater opportunities for feedback loops between RA and RD professionals, resulting in real time process improvements and collaborations.

Objectives

- Maximize efficiency and offer the best service to faculty
- Increase the number and quality of proposals submitted
- Create a resilient research support infrastructure that supports the university as it grows in scale and eminence
- Create a team of RA and RD professionals where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts

Methods

- Faculty and staff committee charged with improving research administration operations across campus
- Consolidated Research Administration (RA) and Research Development (RD) professionals into three central Grant Operation, "GO" Centers
- Launched a robust central Research Development Office
- Developed a more efficient process for proposal submission
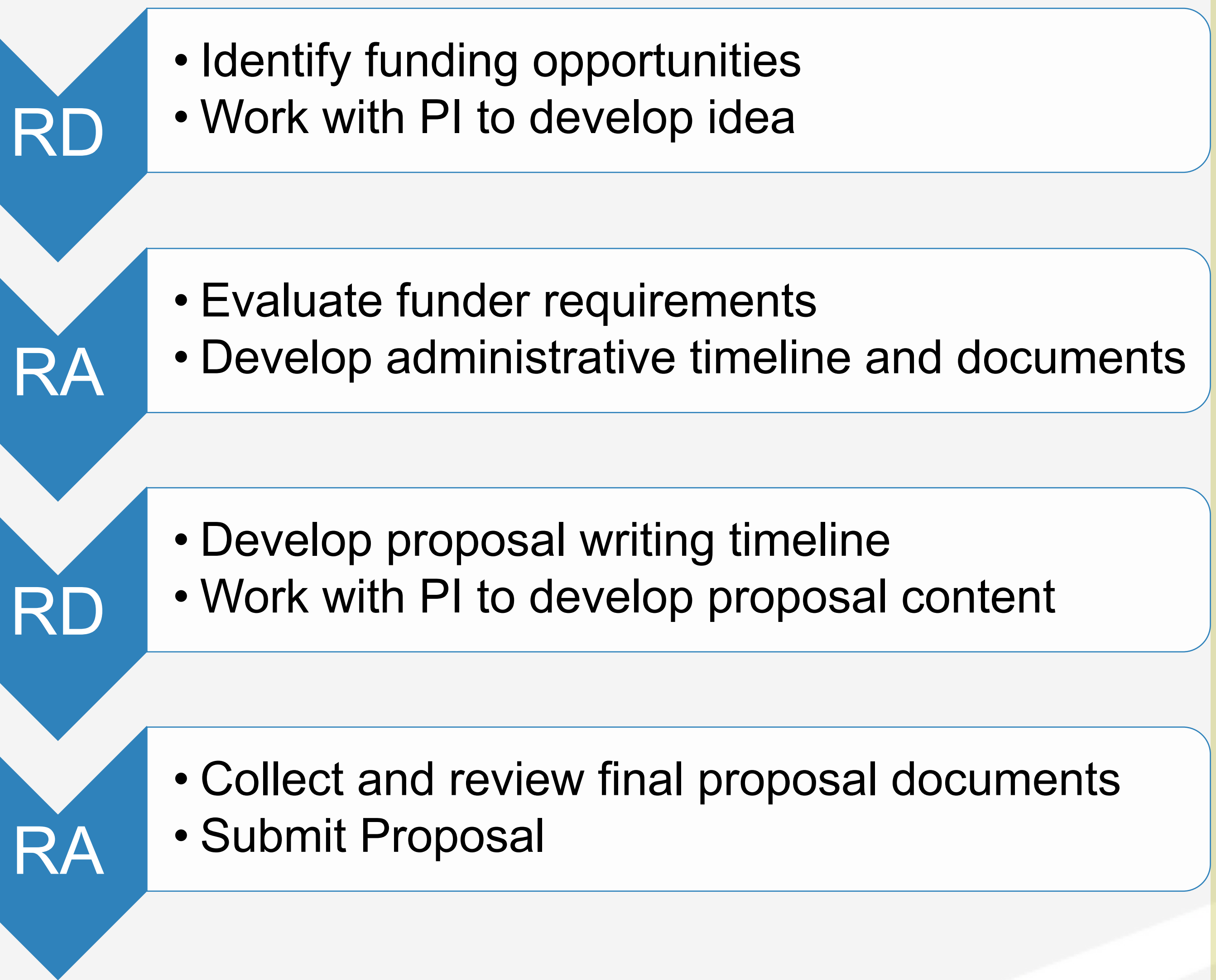- Ensured formal and informal mechanisms for collaborating across RA and RD professionals
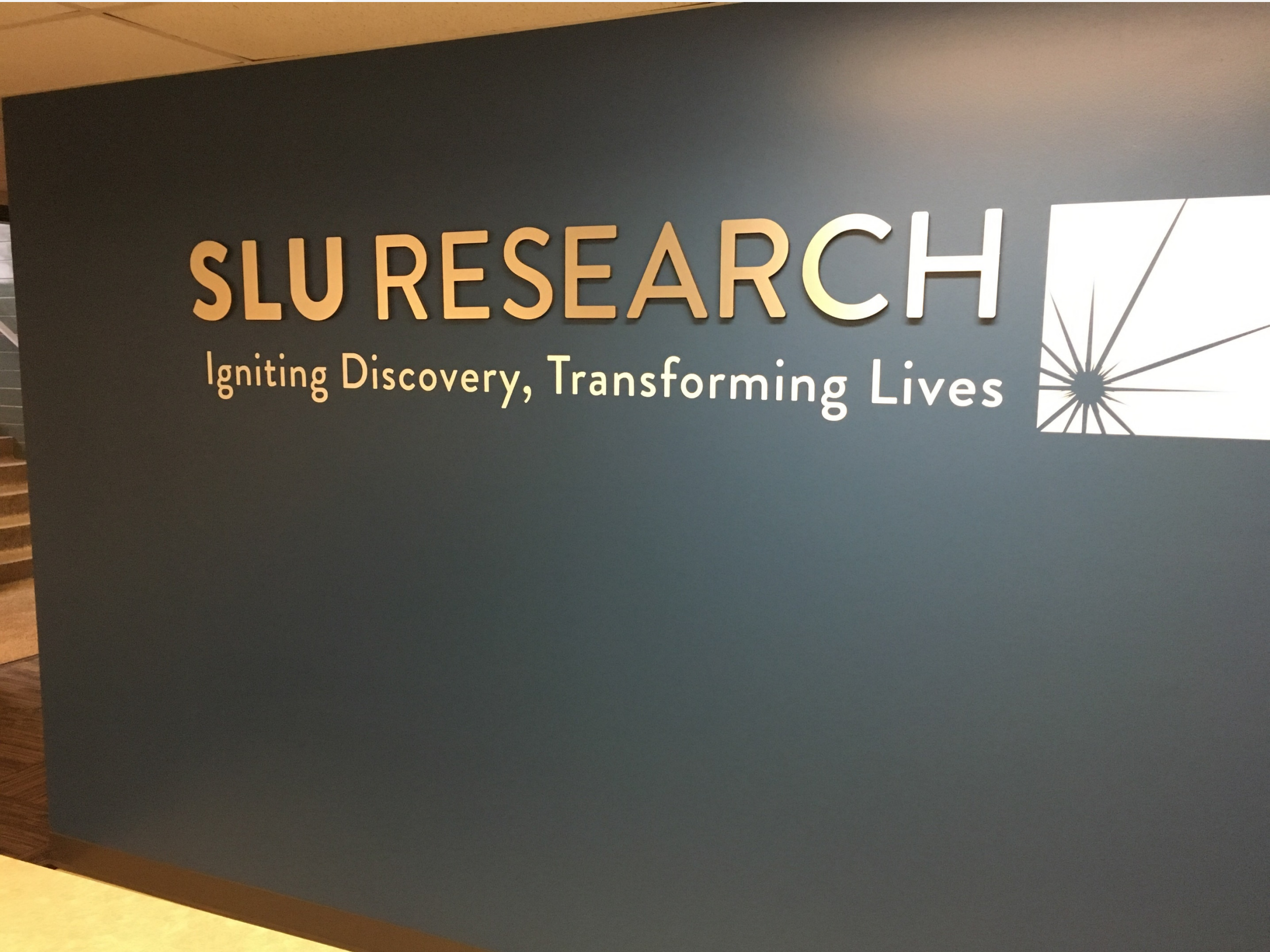
Results

- Increased capacity for both RA and RD professionals
- Cross-training and increased understanding and appreciation between RA and RD professionals
- Reached a greater number of faculty
- Excellent hands-on service across Office of the Vice President for Research units leading to increased faculty satisfaction
- More efficient processes and procedures

Lessons Learned

- Job descriptions should be clearly defined for both RA and RD professionals
- During transition, communication among faculty and staff is key – COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE, COMMUNICATE!
- Working as a team enables collaboration and seamless hand-offs across RD and RA professionals and faculty

RD
- Identify funding opportunities
- Work with PI to develop idea

RA
- Evaluate funder requirements
- Develop administrative timeline and documents

RD
- Develop proposal writing timeline
- Work with PI to develop proposal content

RA
- Collect and review final proposal documents
- Submit Proposal

Conclusions

Major campus re-organizations are challenging. Campus systems are often complex and interconnected. Making a change in one area typically requires changes in other systems and/or units. This re-organization required buy-in from faculty and staff, deans and the provost, and ultimately the president and trustees. Implementing this new model required collaboration across the Office of the Vice President for Research, Human Resources, Business and Finance, and each individual college or department impacted. Ultimately, this resilient research support will enforce and strengthen the university's research culture.