Introduction

The implementation of Research Administration Services (RAS) began with the launch of two RAS units: (1) RAS – Cancer & Imaging, serving the School of Medicine departments of Hematology & Medical Oncology, Radiology & Imaging Sciences, and Radiation Oncology in addition to the Winship Cancer Institute and (2) RAS – Public Health, serving the School of Public Health.

Much has been accomplished during the planning and implementation of these pilot RAS units. The definition of roles and responsibilities, development of standard operating procedures (SOPs), development of new job descriptions, and development of new materials to support operations and training, and the launch of the pilot RAS units have all been completed since late 2012. These RAS units are providing necessary clarity, accountability, structure, and focus to research administration activities.

While there have been successes in the RAS pilots, there are certainly opportunities to both improve pilot and future RAS operations. As expected, during this pilot phase, a number of opportunities to make changes to the design of Research Administration Services and the Implementation process have emerged. Many of these issues actually highlight the urgent need for RAS units and these efforts, underscoring the problematic nature of Emory’s historic research administration operations.

This document lists the key “lessons” learned from the pilot and also indicates key methods to address them.

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RAS Unit Implementation: Lessons Learned

Assessment of Current Unit-Based Operations

1) Assessment of existing Backlog of research administration activities, including Account Reconciliation, Award Cleanup, and Effort Certifications

a. **Key Learning**: RAS Units need an assessment and dedicated plan to clear existing backlog of current activities prior to taking on new activities. RAS Units, and many Departments and Schools on campus, are currently backlogged in activities that are currently department or school activities for research administration, including award reconciliation, cleanup, and effort certifications. Without a significant effort to clean up existing backlog, RAS units can be overwhelmed upon implementation, particularly when faced with the rollout of new activities. A dedicated effort to reconcile accounts, clean up old awards, and complete effort certifications is essential to a successful RAS implementation. This effort must be driven by an analysis of the backlog and a clear plan to ameliorate it. This plan and its execution allows for a structured approach and related interaction with critical stakeholders including Central offices such as OGCA.

b. **How To Address**:
   - FIRA team is currently working closely with first 2 RAS units to help clean up old awards
   - FIRA team is also working with next 2 RAS units (Medicine and Pediatrics) to reduce award cleanup backlog prior to launch
   - Future RAS units will adopt a revised, phased approach for launch.
     - The first phase will include a plan to clear existing backlog as a pre-requisite to implementing SOPs that contain new activities for the RAS units (such as those moving from central to RAS units). Implementation of new activities (in Phase 2 of RAS Implementation) is deferred until adequate clean-up and backlog reduction progress has been determined.
2) RAS Implementation and Rollout Schedule: Phases

a. **Key Learning:** RAS units should be implemented in two phases, with the first phase focused on co-location and adoption of SOPs that address legacy activities; the second phase should focus on implementation of new activities and their associated SOPs.

The RAS unit should be implemented in phases. The initial phase should focus on adoption of SOPs and activities related to legacy (familiar) activities that RAS personnel performed in departments or units. The second phase should then implement new activities moving to the RAS unit (and not familiar to RAS staff). The RAS SOPs segment into these two categories and should be applied accordingly.

During the initial months of launch, RAS staff members adopt and operationalize new SOPs related to their existing (historical) functions while managing their current workload. Implementation of some SOPs, especially those that relate to activities new to RAS staff, can require significant content and technical training along with modification of current business practices. Requiring a significant time commitment for training on new activities can overburden and stress RAS during this time. Such SOPs that functions requiring significant training, such as award setup, should be scheduled for implementation later in the RAS transition, if not occurring last.

b. **How To Address:**

- Revised SOP implementation schedule for new RAS units, using the aforementioned phased approach.
- Functions requiring training will be implemented in phase two, with a more familiar new items (such as invoicing or FFRs) occurring first, followed by more complex and/or less familiar items, such as award setup
- Revised transition of complex new functions, such as award setup to include a stepped approach (i.e. standard awards first, followed by complex awards later)
3) Gap Analysis of Current-state Departmental Procedures

a. **Key Learning:** Gap analysis of current-state procedures in each Department assigned to a RAS unit should be performed prior to launch. This will allow leadership to anticipate implementation challenges and training requirements and to inform rollout schedule and communications plan.

Baseline assessment of current procedures in each of the Departments assigned to RAS units would help identify potential implementation challenges specific to each SOP. Departments have typically performed research administration activities and procedures in varying ways and without standardizing processes.

A gap assessment would help determine where each Department lies relative to the desired state of adherence to SOPs within the RAS unit. It will also help generate department buy in to the RAS effort. Without a baseline assessment of current procedures in each Department, it is difficult to determine critical communications along with procedural and technical training requirements necessary to ensure a successful implementation.

b. **How To Address:**
   - Future RAS Units – Complete gap analysis of Departments assigned to RAS as part of readiness checklist

4) RAS Directors Must Take Ownership of Their RAS Unit’s Implementation Efforts, Including SOP Adoption.

a. **Key Learning:** RAS Directors must be deeply engaged in their RAS unit’s implementation efforts. They need to maintain a sense of ownership, impact, accountability, and calm for all activities through all phases of implementation.

RAS Directors are critical for the successful implementation of the RAS unit. RAS Directors help identify tactical needs and requirements for successful implementation, potential challenges, emerging communications needs, as well as ensure consistent and timely adoption of SOPs.

Directors must also possess a level of gravitas and calm confidence. They must reassure their team during stressful times and lead by example. They must be solution-oriented and clever problem solvers. They must also engage RAS and school/unit leadership in the implementation process, teaming with them to ensure success.
b. **How To Address:**

- For current RAS units, increased involvement of RAS Directors in remaining implementation efforts, including adoption of SOPs for current and new activities
- For future RAS units, active involvement of the RAS Directors in development of implementation plans for their respective RAS units prior to launch
- For all RAS units, ensure the Director presents the leadership skills and calm confidence to steer the RAS team.
5) **Non-RAS Activities (“Orphan Activities”)**

a. **Key Learning:** Facilitate the process for departments to identify, document, and determine who will handle non-RAS activities remaining in Departments. **Conduct before official RAS unit launch.**

   Staff moving from Departments to RAS units can have Departmental responsibilities and perform activities which are not moving into RAS units. This can occur across multiple staff members, with some moving to the RAS unit and others remaining in the department. When personnel move to RAS units, non-RAS “orphan” activities remain in the department; they must be assigned to remaining personnel.

   While RAS personnel legacy duties were identified and non-RAS remaining responsibilities were documented prior to pilot RAS launch, redistribution of these activities by departments proved more challenging than expected. Prior to the launch of the pilot, it will be important to help facilitate the transition as departments determine who will perform these “orphan activities”.

b. **How To Address:**
   - RAS leadership to assist departments in the identification of each staff member moving into the RAS unit, document their current responsibilities/activities and identify which responsibilities/activities will not be moving to the RAS (also known as “orphan activities”). Work with Departments to document which staff will be taking over these “orphan activities” before RAS unit launch.
   - For future RAS units, develop a list of potential orphan activities (to help with creating the list of current responsibilities/activities). Done for pilot RAS units.
   - For SOM specifically, launched a proactive survey to future RAS departments in July 2013 to identify “other” activities that are being performed by staff who also perform pre and post award research administration activities. Also performed for all schools/units.
6) EPEX Routing Approvals

a. **Key Learning:** Prior to RAS launch, need to clearly outline expected EPEX approval process that incorporates the RAS unit, since the routing process currently varies by Department.
   As School and/or Department staff move to the RAS units, updates to the EPEX routing approvals processes are required. These approvals should be identified prior to RAS launch. These approvals need to be compatible with the elimination of duplicative reviews via new EPEX workflow changes. In addition, these new approval workflows must be vetted with Departments and Schools.

b. **How To Address:**
   - Reviewed current EPEX workflow process and newly defined roles and responsibilities for RAS-effected units and departments.
   - Define new EPEX approvals based on new RAS structure.
   - Review documentation regarding responsibilities of EPEX reviewers at each stage of approval process with department, school, and RAS pre-award staff, as applicable

7) Pre vs. Post award Responsibilities and Training

a. **Key Learning:** Existing responsibilities such as progress reports and no-cost extensions, although typically assigned historically to pre-award staff in many departments, requires training and information sharing as it is transitioned to post-award staff in the RAS units.
   As a result of the new roles and responsibilities defined for RAS units, some responsibilities that had been traditionally assigned to pre-award staff in some Departments have been designated as post-award activities in RAS units. Training was neither anticipated nor developed prior to launch for these responsibilities moving within RAS personnel. Traditionally, staff would have received training in their prior positions, now necessitating the need to do so for these individuals as RAS staff.

b. **How To Address:**
   - Leveraging existing staff to provide interim support and guidance
   - Developing additional post-award training for functions that may have been historically completed by pre-award departmental staff
8) Emory Express Workflow Modification

a. **Key Learning:** Workflow for Emory Express requisitions needs modification in order to route purchases on sponsored project accounts to the responsible RAS unit. (This routing historically is done inconsistently within departments.) Traditionally, approvals for purchases on sponsored accounts occurred within departments, administered in varying ways. Based on newly-defined RAS and departmental roles and responsibilities, RAS staff members approve purchases on sponsored accounts (to certain thresholds) for their departments and faculty. (A defined workflow exists for this process within the pilot RAS units.) Updates to the Emory Express workflow process are required to accommodate this change.

b. **How To Address:**
   - Review current responsibilities of Emory Express approvers in planned RAS units and Departments/Schools
   - Define responsibilities of reviewers, including individuals outside of RAS units
   - Adjust workflow in Emory Express to reflect newly defined roles and responsibilities
9) Adequate Staffing of RAS Units

a. **Key Learning:** RAS Units should be adequately staffed for current activities (the first 16 SOPs that cover activities currently done by departments/schools) before implementing additional SOPs, including those that contain new activities that are shifting to the RAS units.

   RAS unit launch requires significant time commitment from RAS staff members for training and adoption of new SOPs. Without adequate staffing, RAS team members may feel overwhelmed by the change in operations and initial time commitment for training and SOP adoption.

b. **How To Address:**
   - Future RAS units will need to be adequately staffed prior to launch
   - Plan to finalize staffing levels, budget and funding for future RAS units and begin staff recruitment at least 90 to 120 days (if not longer) prior to expected launch date
   - Ongoing ("evergreen") job postings for RAS staff positions in order to have a pipeline of candidates for natural and expected continuous turnover

10) Analyses of Current Staff Competencies and Skill Levels

a. **Key Learning:** Analysis of staff competency and skill levels are needed to better anticipate implementation challenges and training requirements.

   Baseline assessment of staff assigned to RAS units would help inform training requirements and potential implementation challenges. Without a baseline assessment of competency and skill level for existing and new functions, it is difficult to determine what additional training would supplement the knowledge base of RAS staff to improve overall service to faculty.

b. **How To Address:**
   - For current RAS units, completing staff competency and skill level assessments as part of workforce transition
For future RAS units, completing staff competency and skill level assessments prior to launch and updating implementation and training plan based on results from assessments.

11) Staff Moving From Departments to RAS
   a. **Key Learning:** When staff in departments only spend a portion of their time on research administration activities, it can be better to leave those staff in departments to help cover non-RAS activities in departments.
      When departments are concerned about losing staff that perform important non-RAS activities for the department, there may be concern and hesitation about losing these staff. In addition, if other staff members are not quickly identified to cover the non-RAS activities, it may be problematic for the department.

   b. **How to Address:**
      • If departmental staff are split, err on the side of leaving them in the department (in a new non-research administration job titles), lest there be a compelling reason (advanced skills, staff preference, etc.) to move them to the RAS unit.

12) RAS Director Recruitment
   a. **Key Learning:** RAS Units should have a Director in place prior to launch.
      In addition to the aforementioned critical engagement during RAS implementation, RAS Directors are essential to establishing and staffing a RAS unit, distributing workload, developing operating norms, operationalizing SOPs, and communicating new roles, responsibilities and procedures to RAS stakeholders. In addition, RAS Directors are critical to identifying issues early on in the RAS launch. Without a Director in place, new RAS units may have difficulty meeting the needs of faculty while managing other challenges related to establishing a new unit. It may be possible, although undesirable, for a RAS unit to launch with an Interim Director. This would need to be assessed on a case-by-case basis, with a clear plan to rapidly hire a permanent Director.

   b. **How To Address:**
      • Posting RAS Director positions well in advance of launch date
        ▪ **Note:** active RAS Director recruitment efforts are underway for RAS: Medicine and RAS: Pediatrics
      • Developing recruiting strategy for future RAS Directors
Change Management

13) Culture change

a. **Key Learning:** Movement to RAS units represents a significant cultural change. Gaining additional ownership from RAS team members, Faculty, Departmental leaders, and Central staff prior to launch is important to support this cultural change. In order to facilitate the adoption of the new model for research administration services, creating a positive consensus based approach from the primary affected parties prior to launch is critical. Without this kind of support from all stakeholders, staff in RAS unit may continue to receive questions regarding the purpose and value of the new model and may not receive necessary active support from stakeholders.

b. **How To Address:**
   - Active engagement of key stakeholders in the planning and launch processes
   - Robust communications to key stakeholders prior to launch, emphasizing the need for change and the potential benefits of new model
   - Continued emphasis on partnership and service role of the RAS
   - Change management retreat prior to launch

14) Building Relationships between RAS and Central Research Administration Offices (i.e. OGCA and OSP)

a. **Key Learning:** Strong relationships between RAS and Central offices are needed to improve communications, workflows, and implement new RAS SOPs successfully.
   Historically, there has been some lack of clarity regarding responsibilities between school/unit research administration staff and central research administration staff. This has, in some cases, led to strained relationships and disconnected communication. The development of clear roles and responsibilities in the RAS planning process has helped to clarify many of these issues. They have also provided structure for communication and relationships between RAS units and central functions.
This is essential in order to effectively adopt and implement RAS SOPs for activities that historically resided in central research administration offices. RAS team members and their designated central representatives must work closely together. Without these strong working relationships, RAS staff members will be unable to successfully adopt their new roles and responsibilities.

b. **How To Address:**
   - Include OSP and OGCA staff in RAS SOP training, especially for those SOPs that involve a significant shift of roles and responsibilities from Central offices to RAS units
   - Develop contact sheet for each RAS unit containing RAS, OGCA, and OSP staff assignments
   - Continued emphasis on partnership with Central offices
   - Inviting OSP and OGCA staff members that serve the RAS unit to participate in RAS social events to build the “one team” environment
15) Metrics / Key Performance Indicators (KPIs)

a. **Key Learning:** KPIs and reports are essential to monitor RAS performance.
RAS performance will be monitored via three mechanisms: a dashboard of KPIs (assembled from Compass and other data), management reports (Compass), and exception reports (Compass). Without these measures and their metrics, it is difficult to measure if the pilots are operating successfully. In addition, it is hard for RAS team members to see how metrics will be used to monitor operational performance. Metrics need to be more adequately described to staff as many interpret that they will be used as methodology to realign or reduce staff.

Upon RAS pilot launch, existing data was not easily aggregated in order to monitor RAS performance, and there are gaps in data desired and presently available. Current data and reporting queries historically have not been mapped to SOPs or RAS operational indicators. Preliminary mapping has been required to determine what data is currently available and how it will be collected to enable the above RAS monitoring mechanisms.

b. **How To Address:**
- Established a dashboard containing primary variables desired to monitor RAS performance
- Determined existing and/or create Compass reports and exception reports to monitor RAS performance. Execute plan to review existing queries and reports to determine what data is currently available and how to collect it
- Communicate how data and metrics will be utilized to stakeholders including RAS staff members, RAS Directors, Faculty, Departments, Schools, and Central Offices
- Execute monitoring via above mechanisms
16) Space Planning

a. **Key Learning:** Lack of assigned RAS space may delay rollout and can impede successful implementation of RAS units.

   Space allocation for any university unit can be tricky. Space ownership, its use, and the needs of the local units must be considered. The RAS units present specific requirements for their space, including an open/collaborative work environment and proximity to the departments or units served.

   An overall RAS space implementation plan, including funding for moving expenses and renovations, is necessary for a timely rollout. Without adequate space and plans for utilizing space appropriately, rollout of RAS units may be delayed. In addition, if adequate space is not identified and planned prior to launch, RAS staff may not be able to perform their new duties effectively and work cohesively as a team in their new units.

b. **How To Address:**

   - Work with key school and university constituents to identify RAS space needs and secure RAS space
   - Develop robust RAS space timeline, which should provide adequate time for renovation, IT needs, and move-in
17) Budgets for RAS units

a. **Key Learning:** Budgets for RAS units need to be finalized and approved prior to launch to minimize disruptions or changes post-launch.

   Budget and funding a new, multifaceted unit requires collaboration among multiple constituents. For the RAS units, budgets must be developed and vetted among all affected parties (including central, Department, and School). This is necessary to ensure that appropriate funds flows occur and that staffing and resources are identified and available for launch. Lack of an approved budget may affect a RAS unit’s ability to operate and maintain its expected level of service.

b. **How To Address:**
   - Develop a preliminary budget (using created template) for expected new RAS unit
   - Vet budget with school and central constituents and finalize
   - Work with finance officers (school and central) to ensure funds flows occur for RAS costs
   - Establish RAS-specific Smartkey prior to launch
Communications

18) Communications Plan

a. **Key Learning:** RAS Units need a defined communications plan approved by the specific RAS unit’s leadership team prior to launch.

   Early and consistent communications to Faculty, Departmental, Central and Campus stakeholders is critical to success of rollout and to identify potential risks early on in the process. A detailed and robust communication plan was executed for the pilot RAS units. Even with repeated messaging, reaching all constituents remains a challenge. Without a defined communications plan with consistent and ongoing communications, faculty and administrators in departments assigned to a RAS unit may not be aware of pending changes in roles and responsibilities and how that would impact their support. This could cause delays or errors in completing activities such as proposal submission or financial reporting.

b. **How To Address:**

   - Developing a formal communication plan for each future RAS unit.
   - Maintaining and executing an ongoing communication plan once RAS units launch.
   - Obtain continued feedback from constituency groups (schools, departments, faculty, etc.) to refine messaging and communication activities.
19) Design and Delivery of Training

a. **Key Learning:** Design and delivery of training and associated materials requires significant resources and time commitment from Central SMEs.

The movement of certain functions from central units to the RAS units necessitated the development of detailed outline of new processes and robust training materials. Design and delivery of training materials requires a major time commitment from Central Administration and other Subject Matter Experts (SMEs), as these materials did not exist. This development was a commendable and significant effort for those involved, placing demands on them beyond their daily operations. This resulted in some delays as material was created, however, going forward it is expected that the demands on development of training materials will be less, with the emphasis on material improvement and delivery. Nonetheless, it is important that training materials and processes are clear in message and work to avoid confusion about roles and responsibilities the RAS unit.

b. **How To Address:**
   - Identify SMEs for each SOP and work with them to develop new training materials specific to the new procedures.
   - Ensure adequate time is allocated for material development, enhancement, and delivery.
   - Develop training schedule based on content required, complexity of materials and training and implementation plan.

20) Compressed Training Schedule

a. **Key Learning:** Compressed training schedule requires significant time commitment from RAS staff members during initial months of RAS unit launch.

During initial months of RAS unit launch, RAS staff members are challenged with competing demands in addition to their existing workload, including logistics of new RAS unit, operationalizing initial SOPs and understanding new roles and responsibilities. In addition to these activities, RAS staff members were attending frequent training sessions related to SOPs that were scheduled for implementation within a few months of launch. As a result, some RAS staff members were overwhelmed by the time commitment from the compressed training schedule along with their new activities. To compensate, future RAS units will be
launched in Phases (mentioned previously), allowing RAS staff to integrate SOPs for legacy activities before training on complex, new activities.

b. **How To Address:**
   - Adjusted SOP implementation schedule for first 2 RAS units based on RAS Director and staff feedback during pilot
   - Modified SOP implementation schedule into Phases for future RAS units to better account for time commitment required from RAS staff members
   - Continuously monitor RAS staff stress levels as they implement SOPs and roles for both legacy and new activities
21) Access to IT Systems

a. **Key Learning**: Access to numerous IT systems is required to enable RAS staff members to perform new responsibilities. Many of the new roles and responsibilities assigned to RAS staff members require additional access to IT systems including NIH (i.e. eRA Commons), Emory research compliance (i.e. IRB and IACUC), and Emory Compass (i.e. security changes to access specific modules in Compass). Such access and associated needs should be identified and provided either prior to launch for day-one RAS responsibilities or in accordance with the movement of related responsibilities to the RAS unit. Without access to these systems, and supplemental training on how to access and utilize the systems to perform their functions, RAS staff members would not have been able to complete some of their assigned activities.

b. **How To Address**:
   - Identify necessary system accesses for RAS staff; outline those accesses along the RAS implementation timeline to ensure access is provided when needed
   - Obtain appropriate eRA Commons access for RAS staff members and provide training materials on how to utilize system
   - Obtain eIRB and Topaz (IACUC) access for appropriate RAS staff members and schedule specific training sessions with IRB and IACUC offices
   - Assess, document, and obtain approval for Compass security changes required for RAS team members