Sponsored Projects Working Group

REPORT

February 24, 2021

UCONN   UCONN HEALTH

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Preamble

President Katsouleas has challenged the University of Connecticut (UConn and UConn Health) to double research and scholarship. To support this effort, this working group was tasked with examining the external funding proposal submission process to identify weaknesses in the system. Such an examination was prompted by communication about the planned enforcement of an existing policy regarding timely submission of proposals to Sponsored Program Services (SPS). The working group agrees with the policy of requiring submission to SPS, five days in advance of deadline, of essential documents related to proposal budgets along with draft narrative, with a later deadline for submission of a final narrative. The working group recognizes that attention to this issue will be a work in progress as recommendations are implemented and new issues are raised.

Ideally, a well-functioning external funding proposal submission system will capitalize on the equal partnership between faculty and staff PIs, administrative staff, and grant management staff, recognizing the key roles and skills that each group brings to the success of UConn's and UCH's research mission. This working group appreciates that rising to President Katsouleas' challenge will likely require enhanced communication between stakeholders, more streamlined submission processes, and investment in personnel and technology systems to alleviate the burden on a stressed proposal submission pipeline. Further, we recognize the need for greater respect for the roles and responsibilities of each member of the proposal preparation process, from PI to proposal administrator to SPS staff.

We see the roles played by investigators, SPS staff, administrators, and others as an equal partnership with a common aim: successful submission of applications for external funding. It is clear from feedback of key stakeholders in the proposal submission process that we have work to do as a community to meet this aspiration. Concerns related to role clarity, implicit hierarchy, incomplete communication, and fundamentally disrespectful interactions suggest that these issues have a significant impact in the current outcomes under which proposal submission process does not always effectively meet the needs of all involved.

The need to address these concerns – in addition to enforcing existing internal proposal submission deadlines – is real, and steps in this direction may increase demands on some PIs. In return, the University must pro-actively evaluate its pre-award services to ensure that everything is being done to provide the most efficient and highest quality services to all those involved in the proposal submission process. This report provides specific recommendations to achieve this goal.

In the following paragraphs, we summarize existing challenges to the efficient preparation and flow of proposals, together with suggested actions to mitigate these challenges from the various perspectives reflected in the working group.

Challenge 1

Some PIs lack access to staff trained in proposal preparation, which impedes timely proposal submission. The number of SPS pre-award staff has not substantially increased over the past decade. See Appendix A.

Recommended Action 1.1

While the approaches taken in different units will vary, it is imperative that the University ensures PIs have access to dedicated, expert staff to assist in proposal submissions. In some cases, this will be at the academic department level; in other cases, services can be made available through a Center/Institute, School/College, OVPR Faculty Services, or other unit. This may require hiring additional staff with expertise in proposal preparation/pre-award, and university-level funding of access to such services.

Recommended Action 1.2

Ongoing training may be needed by staff who provide proposal preparation support. The University can facilitate such training through growth of the OVPR SPS Training Program and ensuring that the Training Program is institutionalized and accessible so that different units fully develop the necessary expertise.

Challenge 2

PIs are inadequately informed about review stages that precede submission and about the time required for each, leading to insufficient understanding of the reasons for the timeline policy and scant motivation to adhere to it.

Recommended Action 2.1

Every School/College should ensure and disseminate a clearly defined workflow and suggested timeline that links with OVPR proposal deadline policy. This includes the possibility for some parts of the proposal (e.g., narrative) to be submitted later than others (e.g., budget). See Appendix E.

Recommended Action 2.2

The OVPR should ensure that roles and responsibilities of all parties (PIs/Co-PIs and proposal staff) involved in the proposal submission process are clearly defined.

Recommended Action 2.3

Ensure a means of inter-unit coordination among Schools/Colleges, Centers/Institutes, and academic departments for collaborative proposals for timely submission.

Recommended Action 2.4

The OVPR should ensure exceptions and conditions warranting a deadline policy waiver are explicated and fully communicated to PIs/CO-Is and proposal support staff.

Challenge 3

Pre-award backlogs stem from a lack of a streamlined approval process, causing stress for SPS staff and faculty.

The OVPR should take the lead on the following:

Recommended Action 3.1
Continue to evaluate UConn/UCH pre-award processes and procedures to implement best practices. Such an analysis of the University's pre-award services/resources and procedures can be illuminated through comparison of peer and aspirant institutions. See Appendix F.

Recommended Action 3.2
Implement procedures to maintain consistency of all pre-award requirements between all parties involved in proposal submissions. Provide timely communication of all changes in requirements to all relevant parties.

Recommended Action 3.3
The current policy requires a three-day deadline for final narrative. To allow for the maximum time available to faculty to write/edit their proposal narrative, the working group recommends that final narratives should be submitted no later than noon the day before the submission deadline. SPS can provide additional guidance on the benefits of earlier submission of final narratives.[1]

Recommended Action 3.4
Consider software solutions to streamline proposal development, approval, and submission. A potential solution is to add InfoEd Proposal Tracking onto InfoEd Proposal Development (PD), which has electronic approval routing and may greatly expedite the proposal submission process. See Appendix B.

Recommended Action 3.5
Consider how best to use firms that offer proposal services (such as Hanover Research) in a way that is cost-effective and complements SPS skills and capacities.

Recommended Action 3.6
Consider developing a formal mechanism for routine, open communication about pre-award processes, whereby PIs and staff can submit observations and suggestions for improvement and receive a response on actions taken to address their suggestions. This approach should be

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[1] Earlier submission of the final or near-final project narrative to SPS ameliorates the bottleneck in proposal processing and allows time for constructive feedback on narrative completeness.

dedicated to continuous improvement capable of addressing the myriad of details inherent in pre-award. Possible ways to incorporate PI and staff feedback include a crowdsourcing system, and a standing committee.

Challenge 4

The lack of uniform and well-defined procedures for cash and/or in-kind cost sharing – common features of proposal budgets – results in confusion and delays in proposal processing. Investigators, departments, and Schools/Colleges prepare cost share differently. Some include a cash component, while others include all in-kind. The cash portion of a cost share is frequently provided by multiple university units including the OVPR, Centers/Institutes, Schools/Colleges, departments, and faculty members. In these cases, the process of securing commitments and signatures can be cumbersome in the pre-award phase, and it can generate additional work in the post-award phase.

The OVPR should collaborate with School/College leadership on the following:

Recommended Action 4.1
Establish clear process and create guidance documents for mandatory cost share. Similarly, develop and broadly distribute procedures and guidelines for faculty to request and justify voluntary commitments of cash cost share.

Recommended Action 4.2
Develop means of streamlining inclusion of cost share. For example, when a cash contribution is required, it could be deducted directly from the indirect costs generated by the grant. In many cases, this change would eliminate the need for securing commitments and signatures during the pre-award workflow and the collecting of costs from those units during post-award workflow.

Recommended Action 4.3
Develop detailed information with examples of ways to provide in-kind cost sharing, and provide it to faculty and pre-award staff. This information should be as exhaustive as possible to make it easier for faculty to meet cost sharing requirements using in-kind contributions.

Recommended Action 4.4
Develop procedures to streamline inclusion of minimal in-kind cost share by an academic faculty member, which currently requires that a faculty member's department head sign and approve each commitment of cost shared effort. A potential solution would be for department heads to authorize minimal commitments by signing a single letter once a year for all their faculty, thereby eliminating the need for signatures on individual proposals throughout the year.

Recommended Action 4.5

To reduce administrative burden and expedite submissions, develop procedures to permit, without re-signing of cost share forms, minor variances in the approved cost share amount that occur as the proposal budget is finalized.

Appendix A: SPS FTEs and Proposal Counts

SPS Equivalent FTEs committed to Proposal Review and Submission

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018	2019	2020
Total FTE Grant Specialists*							
UConn Storrs**	4	4	4.25	4.35	4.35	5.35	6.45
UConn Health	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.4	2.7	2.7
Authorized Officials***							
UConn Storrs	1(2)	1(3)	2 (4)	2 (4)	2 (4)	2 (4)	2 (4)
UConn Health	1 (2)	1 (2)	1 (2)	1 (3)	1 (3)	1 (3)	1 (3)
Proposals Submitted****							
UConn Storrs	1669	1703	1666	1645	1669	1609	1590
UConn Health*****							763

Notes:

* Equivalent FTE of Grant Specialists effort devoted to reviewing, certifying and submitting proposals

**The fractional FTE count of Grants Specialists at Storrs represents the portion of Faculty Services FTE who certify and submit proposals

*** Authorized Officials are those with signatory authority such as the Director and Assistant Director (Team Lead)

****Submitted proposals (not inclusive of revisions, resubmissions, post-submission requests, requested reports, etc)

*****Due to tracking changes at UCH, consistent and comparable data is not available prior to 2020

Increased Regulatory and Sponsor Requirements this Decade Include:

-Increase in administrative requirements in proposals and progress reports

-Increase in subawardee requirements

-Compliance Growth

- Conflict of interest reporting and mangement
- Export control
- Current and pending reporting
- Foreign influence
- Data security

Appendix B: InfoEd Proposal Development (PD) Module

Overview

UConn/UCH should pursue modernization in the tools that are available for preparing a proposal and securing university approvals. InfoEd PD is part of the University licensed suite of software but is not currently utilized. InfoEd PD should be considered to determine whether it is a tool that would support the preparation, routing, and submission of proposals at the University.

InfoEd PD was enhanced in partnership with Yale University and is a system for proposal preparation, approval routing, and system-to-system proposal submission to most federal sponsors. The software assists in the creation of proposals in a variety of ways which include:

- Populating institutional data electronically
- "Cloning" documents from other proposals
- Viewing of the proposal under development by various users and offices
- Automates aspects of budget development
- Electronic routing
- Electronic submission
- Automated checks of certain proposal elements before submission
- Facilitates the overall preparation of the administrative sections of a proposal

InfoEd PD Universities

InfoEd PD is a matured module and is in use at many institutions across the country, such as:

Nearby

- Connecticut Children's Hospital
- Yale University
- University of Rhode Island (just went live recently)
- Marine Biological Laboratory
- Jackson Laboratory (deployed 2019/2020; UConn Health SPS shares a position with Jackson Laboratories supporting joint UConn-JAX faculty. This SPS employee works in InfoEd PD at Jackson Laboratory in supporting proposal development and submission.)

Nationally

- University of Pennsylvania
- Weill Cornell Medicine
- Mount Sinai
- Northwestern University
- Oregon Health & Sciences University
- Dana Farber Cancer Institute
- Temple University
- University of Colorado
- Washington University, St. Louis

InfoEd PD Options & Implementation

InfoEd PD may be implemented to varying degrees ranging from electronic routing (essentially replacing the paper-based process of proposal routing through the University) to full implementation (building proposal, routing, system-to-system submission). A limited implementation of routing, for example, is likely achievable in 12 months. A full implementation would take up to 12-24 months for full deployment. In the latter case, dedicated project staff would be required to implement the software and would require university-wide training of users and an enhanced help desk.

Based on best practices gleaned from consultant experience, UConn/UCH should provide a demonstration of the system to a group of faculty and/or department administrators. The group should be a mix of PIs submitting and administrators supporting applications often to those that are not frequent submitters. This will gauge the user-friendly nature of the system and give faculty and administrators the opportunity to provide feedback, thereby ensuring their voice is represented in the process.

Users

InfoEd PD may be used by staff and faculty. However, based on Yale's experience, the tool may be best used by administrators supporting faculty in the building of their proposals. The module has been described by users as significantly more faculty-friendly when compared to other InfoEd modules.

Appendix C: Staff-suggested questions for evaluation by working group

- Training
  - This should be considered at all levels. Additional training of PIs, Department Administrators and SPS staff. Alone, each of these areas would benefit from additional training. Integrating all three would add additional benefits
- Improving the level of administrative support in departments. Ensuring that more departments have dedicated, expert staff assisting in the proposal submission process. This is something that makes a huge difference in the efficiency of the process and the amount of time and work that SPS staff must put into each proposal that is reviewed.
  - Those that do not have or cannot access such support could be encouraged to participate in the Faculty Services group.
- Look for ways to improve communication between all areas involved in the process. One of which could be opportunities for more integration of SPS with Faculty Services.
- Evaluate processes and procedures at both UConn and UConn Health for best practices to be implemented at both.
- With proper training and experience, provide more authority (signatory, etc.) for the grant specialists.
- Evaluate ways to make the process of obtaining the approvals / signatures of required offices and officials more efficient.
- Staffing: Ensuring that there are sufficient people with the requisite expertise at all levels of the proposal process to ensure the ability to perform thorough reviews during peak deadline periods.
- Consider software solutions to streamline the proposal development, approval and submission process. Consider adding InfoEd PT onto InfoEd PD, which has electronic approval routing from Departments through SPS.
- Having Faculty Services available to any department who would like to access their services.
  - Ensure consistency in reviews performed by all Pre-Award staff members reviewing proposals.

Appendix D: Faculty-suggested questions for evaluation by working group

1. Human resources:
    a. Are the quantity and distribution of pre-award staff adequate for current and projected needs?
    b. How do they compare with peer and aspirant institutions?
2. Training and community mindset:
    a. How is staff training assessed?
    b. Have roles and responsibilities been clearly defined?
3. Should PIs be better familiarized with processes? Do PIs appreciate benefits of current pre-award services?
    a. Is there a sense of shared purpose, continuous promulgation of best practices?
    b. How do we ensure consistency of policies and procedures and their timely dissemination across the entire community?
4. Process engineering:
    a. Where are bottlenecks in proposal review?
    b. Is proposal tracking sufficient and is it effectively communicated to those that need it?
    c. Are the electronic forms effective and efficient?
    d. Is there room for improvement in signing processes?
    e. What mechanisms are in place to receive suggestions and proactively streamline pre-award processes?
5. Expanded services; should additional pre-award resources be directed at:
    a. Identifying large funding opportunities and promoting development of proposals to them?
    b. Working with PIs on proposal narratives?
6. Cost sharing:
    a. Is the process for requesting cost sharing clear and well defined?
    b. Should we develop standard procedures for proposals with required cost sharing?
7. Incentives, exceptions and flexibility in deadline policy:
    a. can policy can be relaxed in meritorious cases (e.g. late breaking opportunities, collaborative proposals across multiple institutions) without causing problems with workflow for standard proposals?
    b. What incentives would motivate PIs to submit materials in a more timely fashion?

Appendix E: Notice on UConn Proposal Submission Policy

From: Maric, Radenka
Subject: Important Notice on Proposal Submission Policy
Date: Tuesday, December 15, 2020 2:44:46 PM
Attachments: image.png

Please forward to faculty in your school/college.

Dear Investigators and Research Administrators,

As an applicant organization, UConn/UConn Health has an institutional responsibility to verify the accuracy, validity, conformity, and eligibility of all applications submitted to a sponsor on behalf of the University. We have been exploring how to ensure the best delivery of services, meet sponsor and institutional policy requirements that were highlighted in the recent NSF audit, and to ensure that the University has sufficient time to review and certify proposals and increase the number of successful applications. To that end, we have conducted a survey of all faculty who submitted grant proposals within the last two years, listened to the research community's comments at town halls, and solicited input from the President, Provost, deans, associate deans for research, the President's Research Advisory Council, University Senate, and other faculty groups.

This listening process revealed that one of the main challenges for both investigators and staff is the bottleneck that occurs immediately prior to proposal submission. In recent years, nearly two-thirds of proposals submitted (with all components ready) are received by Sponsored Program Services (SPS) within one working day or less of the sponsor deadline.

Numerous proposals are being submitted just barely in time, meaning there is little time for a thorough review. Additionally, proposals that have been submitted to SPS far in advance also routinely lack a timely and thorough review because other proposals with an earlier deadline came in and "cut the line."
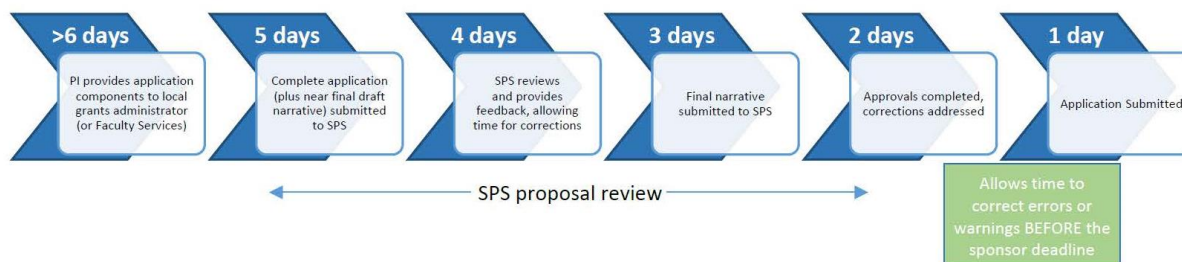
To begin to remedy the proposal submission bottleneck, beginning April 5, 2021, the Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR) will implement the current policy on internal deadlines for the review and submission of sponsored project proposals. The process change aims to reduce last day proposal submissions and will **prioritize proposals as received**. Once the policy is implemented, final administrative components of a proposal must be received by SPS Pre-Award at least five full business days in advance of the submission due date (project narrative can be submitted three days before the deadline).

Exceptions include short turnaround RFPs, last minute sponsor requests, or a last minute opportunity to join a proposal under submission by another institution. Also, each UConn investigator will be given one pass to use in the event they are not able to meet the internal five-day deadline. As is the current practice, SPS Pre-Award will make every effort to submit these proposals when possible. **Please visit the OVPR website for additional information and FAQs regarding the internal deadline policy.**

To increase faculty support related to proposal preparation, the OVPR will be taking the following additional steps:

1. The OVPR is working to address situations where investigators do not have dedicated administrative support for the preparation of a proposal; we will continue to increase staff training opportunities, extend faculty service offerings, and work to simplify the submission process.

2. The OVPR will implement a dashboard to increase transparency and provide information on the status and order of review.

3. The OVPR will provide additional research development services, such as grant editing and proofreading, proposal review, large and complex grant support, and research funding consultation. Further information regarding these services and how to request them will be available in January 2021.

4. The OVPR will continue to work with and incorporate feedback from faculty working groups, as well as a working group soon to be appointed by the President as recommended by the Senate Executive Committee.

Development, review, and submission timeline:

>6 days	5 days	4 days	3 days	2 days	1 day
PI provides application components to local grants administrator (or Faculty Services)	Complete application (plus near final draft narrative) submitted to SPS	SPS reviews and provides feedback, allowing time for corrections	Final narrative submitted to SPS	Approvals completed, corrections addressed	Application Submitted

←——————— SPS proposal review ———————→

Allows time to correct errors or warnings BEFORE the sponsor deadline

Full Business Days Before Submission Deadline

>6 days: PI provides application components to local grants administrator (or Faculty Services)
5 days: Complete application (plus near final draft narrative) submitted to SPS
2-5 days: SPS reviews and provides feedback, allowing time for corrections
3 days: Final narrative submitted to SPS
1-2 days: Approvals completed, corrections addressed
1 day or more before deadline: Application submitted

SPS is responsible for ensuring that applications are compliant and that institutional and sponsor guidelines are met including administrative, management, and scientific information. Please contact Paul Hudobenko (hudobenko@uchc.edu/UConn Health) or Mark Reeves (mark.reeves@uconn.edu/Storrs and Regionals) with questions as we move to a consistent and sustainable process.

Thank you for your continued cooperation in our collaborative efforts to advance UConn's mission through innovative research, scholarship, and creative pursuits.

With regards,

Radenka Maric, PhD

Vice President for Research, Innovation and Entrepreneurship

Michael Glasgow
Associate Vice President for Research, Sponsored Program Services

Appendix F: SPS at other institutions

How do other institutions manage proposal submissions?

Mike Glasgow distributed a two-question email survey to sponsored programs colleagues at other institutions

- Of those surveyed, 100% handle electronic submissions centrally
  - 97% (36/37) have an internal deadline for submission

Yes 100%
UCONN

No 3%
Yes 97%
UCONN

1. Are your proposal submissions made centrally? (A university-sponsored project office that does final review and submission?)
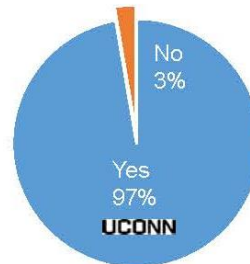
2. Does your institution have an internal proposal deadline for review and submission?

*The UCONN symbol is inserted next to UConn policies.

What is your internal submission deadline?

2 days 8%
3 days 20%
5 days 36%
Hybrid 36%
UCONN
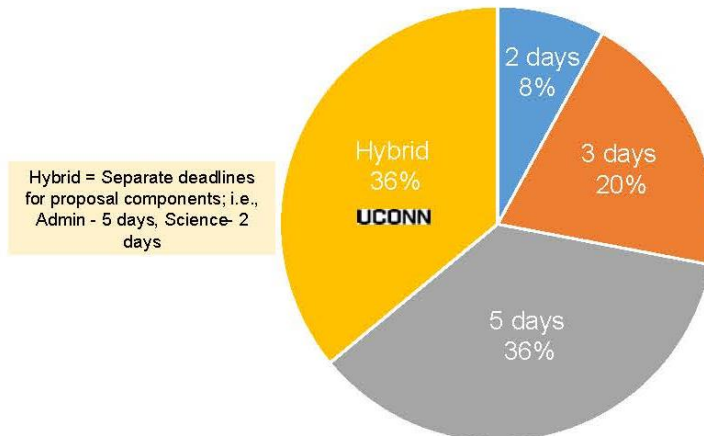
Hybrid = Separate deadlines for proposal components; i.e., Admin - 5 days, Science- 2 days

Out of 25 survey responses and website searches

What happens if the deadline is not met?

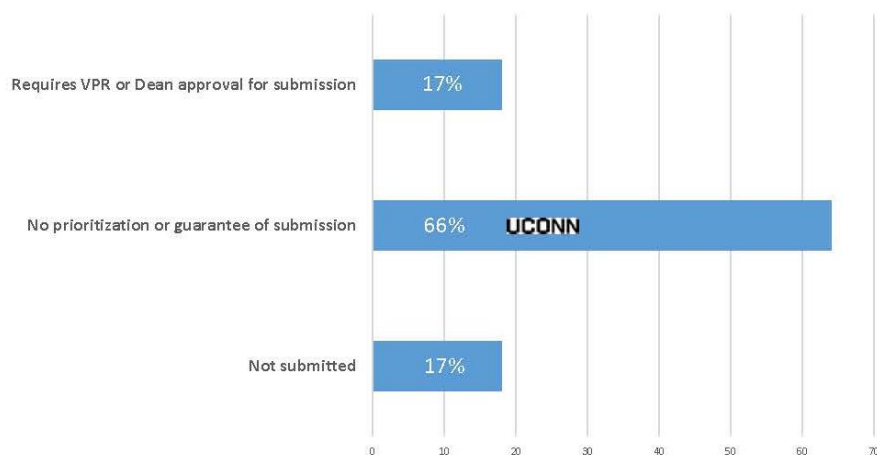| Category	Percentage
Requires VPR or Dean approval for submission	17%
No prioritization or guarantee of submission	66% UCONN
Not submitted	17%

Out of 24 survey responses and website searches

Peer Institution Policies

Institution	Deadline Policy	Notes
University of Connecticut UCONN	Hybrid (5 and 3 days)	3 days recommended; exceptions for last-minute sponsor request/opportunity, or use of an exception pass
Indiana University	Hybrid based on sponsor (NSF, NIH, etc.)	
Michigan State University	3 days submission ready	Exceptions for late-breaking opportunities or with endorsement of Research Dean
Purdue University	Hybrid (4 and 2 days)	No prioritization or guarantee of submission if deadline not met
University of Delaware	Hybrid (3 and 2 days)	No prioritization or guarantee of submission if deadline not met

Appendix G: Working group meeting minutes

Sponsored Projects Working Group
Meeting Agendas and Minutes

2.17.21

Attendees:

Accorsi, Michael	Glasgow, Michael	Gould, Joni
Holden, Stephanie	Holgerson, Kathleen	Hudobenko, Paul
Lillo-Martin, Diane	Markowski, Maryann	Meister, Marie
Myers, Emily	O'Connell, Caitlin	~~Pereira Lopes, MiChelle~~
Schultz, Eric	Smith, Amy	Vella, Anthony (Chair)
Venkitanarayanan, Kumar	Williams, Michelle	

Agenda
- Goes to Pres by Feb. 24, his choice as to where it goes next
    - Note in today''s minutes Senate and Faculty Standards reviews pre-Pres presentation were raised and decided on not doing so given charge and reporting line of working group
- About final narrative deadline in 3.3
    - Last-minutes changes are in fact what causes the bulk of the bottleneck that this group is addressing. 3 days is idea, but SPS staff absolutely needs at least a full day to make the final narrative changes to meet the deadlines. This both manages workflow stress points and maximizes faculty time to polish the narrative.
    - Language about what happens to those whose proposals *aren't* submitted by the deadline
        - The way the policy is written, those who fully submit by the policy deadlines will be given priority. Awards submitted late will be addressed in the order in which they arrived in the queue and will be addressed only if there's time.
        - Fears of a slippery slope, and we desperately need change to relieve these pressure points
        - Challenges to staff to really draw their lines when big proposals are at/beyond deadline vs. smaller proposals fully submitted well in advance
        - UConn deadline in relation to other institutions, some of which are same-day for narrative, some of which are 1 - 2 weeks; we need to change the culture here.
        - If you ask the faculty what their deadline is, and you ask the staff the same question, you will likely get two different answers, and that is the heart of this discussion/challenge
        - We don't want to understate or overstate the rules of engagement in 3.3
        - The philosophy is that those who submitted fully and well in advance need to be rest assured that their proposal will be submitted by the deadline, which had been sacrificed/problematic in the past
        - This is all about shifting from a policy of review and submission by SPS staff based on proposal submission by deadline to proposal submission in order of receipt
        - → There is clearly some disagreement about the deadline
- Language of UConn, UConn Health (Markowski)

Action items
Markowski will provide clean PDF file tonight for final edits/comments
Glasgow and Williams to confirm info in footnote for clarity

2.10.21

Attendees:

Accorsi, Michael	Glasgow, Michael	Gould, Joni
Holden, Stephanie	Holgerson, Kathleen	Hudobenko, Paul
Lillo-Martin, Diane	Markowski, Maryann	Meister, Marie
Myers, Emily	O'Connell, Caitlin	Pereira Lopes, MiChelle
Schultz, Eric	Smith, Amy	Vella, Anthony (Chair)
Venkitanarayanan, Kumar	Williams, Michelle	

Agenda
- Inclusion of meeting minutes in report?
  - Will include, to evidence process, workload, participation balance
- Draft review
  - Changing "Problem" to "Challenge"
  - Actionable 1.1: The OVPR's shared services model is efficient (Pre-Award, Faculty Services, Post-Award), should it be subsidized by departments?
    - Buy in from the department to the School is important, and if a gap for funding remains then discussions between the Dean and the OVPR are recommended
    - Asking departments with little grant $ to share cost further disadvantages them vs departments with more funds available for such an expense
  - Challenge 2: Just want to make sure faculty don't submit proposals because they don't think they can make the 5-day deadline
    - Support for large/complex proposals is increasing in OVPR via budding Research Development Services (RDS) team (Bethany Javidi and Caitlin O'Connell); substantial continued growth would likely require increases in personnel
  - Actionable 3.3 moved to Actionable 2.1
    - Important for OVPR to engage in discussions w/faculty, President's cabinet, Provost's cabinet re: policy of having proposals completely submitted 3 days before deadline vs. OVPR's looser enforcement
      - Per MiChelle Lopes - an outline of the scientific narrative would be acceptable for SPS to confirm that all components required in the narrative are present -- need to ensure that the proposal is not rejected because of a missing component, and allow faculty enough time to write any missing sections
      - Joni - We also need to keep in mind the number of proposals received for each due date - if all scientific narratives for one due date come in the hour before the submission time, it is difficult to provide review.

Action items
- There are faculty that conduct research sans any staff support, and that is unacceptable.
- All: Review the minutes for inclusion at end of report; edit as appropriate or comment to strike from record
- Lopes, Gould, Glasgow to add addendum on science narrative 3 day deadline - offer more guidance and detail on what should be included; clarification for faculty on exactly what is due
- Markowski to coalesce, post for final comment prior to next meeting (Feb. 17)
- Holden to provide cover sheet for report

2.3.21

Attendees:

Accorsi, Michael	Glasgow, Michael	Gould, Joni
~~Holden, Stephanie~~	Holgerson, Kathleen	Hudobenko, Paul
Lillo-Martin, Diane	Markowski, Maryann	Meister, Marie
Myers, Emily	O'Connell, Caitlin	Pereira Lopes, MiChelle
Schultz, Eric	Smith, Amy	Vella, Anthony (Chair)
Venkitanarayanan, Kumar	Williams, Michelle	

Agenda
1. Review Preamble and addendums (Emily, Kathleen, Mike and Michelle and the rest of the group)
   - We may want to be a bit more pointed about civility re: the interrelationship between faculty and staff
   - We may need to emphasize more the recognition of the group's starting point of the proposal submission deadline policy; that the group voted strongly in favor of having a deadline; that OVPR has been and will continue to evaluate this policy as well as others as part of its regular duties
   - Are there spaces we want to acknowledge for staff PIs?
     - Yes, we can be generally more inclusive of mentioning that PIs can be non-faculty

2. Discuss the possibility of a firm or a staff position that offers proposal services (Eric and Tony)
   - Can make big differences in helping multiple voices in a proposal come together as one
   - Hanover
     - How well known is using Hanover? How accessible are their services?
       - CAHNR learned about Hanover from OVPR. CAHNR has its own contract with them for the whole College, hosts its own internal workflow/screening of requests for services. Well-advertised in College, College staff facilitate scheduling between Hanover and faculty
       - ENGR has a FT writer-editor for large/complex/big-team/high-priority proposals. Flow was sufficient to merit FT employment, also retain PT special payroll for overflow

- SOM has their own science(or writer?) editors, as does JAX
  - Are Hanover's services duplicative to UConn services?
    - Yes and no; OVPR doesn't have illustrator services, science editors
    - It's really about bandwidth and expertise; OVPR is building a Research Development Services (RDS) team to begin helping to address writer-editor services on large/complex/interdisciplinary proposals
  - OVPR has worked with Hanover for ~5 years now, has 2 worklines secured for the university
    - OVPR connects with school/college associate deans of research to identify projects that rise to the level of warranting this service
    - Projects are done sequentially; what you're paying for is time
  - As we strive to communicate more about these services, let it not diminish the importance of building in-house expertise and the relationships between faculty and staff
  - ○ Challenges in proposal's transition from Faculty Services to Pre-Award; bandwidth to train staff in all units
  - ○ Challenges for staff in consistent communication about proposal-submission particulars, where the direction differs between points of contact/approval

3. Need to discuss timeline, including a rough draft that has a Preamble, body of document with problems/actions, addendums, and data. Should be organized, simple to follow, not too wordy but instead precise, and maybe in booklet form with a cover page picture of Johnathan (I love dogs!).
   - ○ Reminder of the Schultz Timeline
     - **Feb. 10**: An early-draft preprint version of the report is reviewed by the working group
     - **Feb. 15**: E-vote for approval of draft by the working group, results communicated to the SEC and Faculty Standards chair Holle
     - **Feb. 17**: Further amendments to the document can be considered by the working group during its regular meeting; any changes distributed to SEC and Faculty Standards immediately after the meeting.
     - **Feb. 24**: Based on feedback from SEC/Faculty Standards, working group can suggest changes and communicate a revised version immediately to the Senate office.

Action items
- Holgerson to review preamble for additional language re: staff/faculty interrelationship; recognition of starting point of acceptance of proposal submission deadline policy
- Glasgow and Williams to include language re: added staff tasks/workload/burden required to meet record-keeping/compliance/funding mandates
- Glasgow and Williams responsible for addenda
- Glasgow to add to Accorsi's chart, inc. developments in conflict of interest, export control, constituency diversity of PIs/CO-Is, complexity of proposals
- Accori and Schultz to work on cost-sharing component
- Lillo-Martin to work on draft (except for cost-sharing component)

1.27.21

Attendees:

Accorsi, Michael	Glasgow, Michael	Gould, Joni
Holden, Stephanie	Holgerson, Kathleen	~~Hudobenko, Paul~~
Lillo-Martin, Diane	~~Markowski, Maryann~~	Meister, Marie
Myers, Emily	O'Connell, Caitlin	Pereira Lopes, MiChelle
Schultz, Eric	Smith, Amy	Vella, Anthony (Chair)
Venkitanarayanan, Kumar	Williams, Michelle	

Agenda

1. Timeline update
    A. As planned, Schultz submitted a short narrative of the working group's progress to the Senate Executive Committee (SEC). We received a couple of questions:
        ○ What will happen with the draft report?
        ○ Will it be shared with the SEC, Faculty Standards Committee and/or faculty for feedback?
        ○ What will the mechanism for feedback be?
        ○ It was noted that there is no representation from the regionals or SSW - Will there be an opportunity to provide feedback?

    B. The Senate Exec will have a meeting with committee chairs on Feb. 19. This would be a good occasion on which to get such feedback from Faculty Standards and the SEC. The agenda and materials for these meetings is usually sent out first thing Thursday morning.

        The agenda and materials for the March 1 Senate meeting need to be submitted on Feb. 24, but Schultz thinks we can get away with submitting at day's end if he is particularly nice to Cheryl (as he always is because she is an exemplary person).

    C. Schultz proposes this (excruciatingly tight) timeline - *will revisit in our next meeting; will likely be a week delayed*:
        ○ **Feb. 10**: An early-draft preprint version of the report is reviewed by the working group
        ○ **Feb. 15**: E-vote for approval of draft by the working group, results communicated to the SEC and Faculty Standards chair Holle
        ○ **Feb. 17**: Further amendments to the document can be considered by the working group during its regular meeting; any changes distributed to SEC and Faculty Standards immediately after the meeting.
        ○ **Feb. 24**: Based on feedback from SEC/Faculty Standards, working group can suggest changes and communicate a revised version immediately to the Senate office.

2. Review of Glasgow [paragraph about InfoEd PD implementation](#)

    ● Can be included in the report - but should not be an endorsement to implement this particular software, should only be offered as a possibility

- Positive reports from Jackson Labs using this system
- Glasgow will add local/other institutions using PD to bolster the argument and acknowledge possible issues
- Pereira Lopes asked about IRB concerns and data integration concerns - is this module actually easier?
  - Automated form-filling
  - Proposal cloning
  - Can build customized forms; should reduce data entry
- Myers - Who will be using this - SPS staff or PIs? Concerns are different based on who will be operating within the system

3. Review of Vella's [summary of issues impacting grant submissions](#)
   - Roles and responsibilities between PIs, department admins and SPS should be clearly delineated
   - Should the report look like Vella's summary with Problems and Action Items, should it be a long traditional report, should it have figures and flow charts?
     - How to ensure it is digestible and readable
     - Can add addenda to each item if needed
     - **Working Group supports a bulleted, succinct list with a preamble describing guiding principles on how we approached our suggestions**
   - Language regarding staff should clearly align with how we approach the importance of their role
     - Emphasize civility and respect in recognizing staff expertise as part of our shared mission
     - We should also emphasize community and accountability rather than the "traditional" implied hierarchy of staff serving PIs
     - PIs should be considerate of staff time and effort
   - Clear communication regarding roles and processes
     - A flow chart to communicate the overall process and who is responsible/ who to contact at what point may be helpful - issues with clarity
       - Suggest including in preamble
     - Kumar - Collective feedback from CAHNR faculty - Inconsistency between messaging from Faculty Services and PreAward
     - Williams shared [Grant Proposal Submission Process](#) from the School of Nursing
       - Suggest SPS works with schools/colleges to develop what this would look like in your space

4. Additional items identified
   - Accorsi - Cost-share: The process is unclear - where does it occur? Can get messy and confusing and can delay proposal submission
     - Should this be in the scope of the working group?
       - We agree that it is an impediment to timely submission and can be mentioned
   - Schultz - Need a clear articulation of flexibility around exceptions to the proposal timeline enforcement

- - E.g., late-breaking opportunities, sponsors with no clear deadline established, complications with subawards
    - Williams - these are embedded within our current version of the internal deadline enforcement - we may need to provide guidance on what constitutes "late-breaking", etc.
  - Lillo-Martin - we also need to identify the role of faculty members in any of these problems - clearly delineate roles and responsibilities
  - Accorsi- We may want to set up a system for "crowd-sourcing" the identification of problems and possible solutions to address streamlining the complexity of PreAward
  - Pereira Lopes notes that the SPS submitting and certifying staff have not grown commensurate with faculty growth and proposal submission increases

Action Items for Next Meeting

- Glasgow - Add to InfoEd PD implementation paragraph
  - Add in examples of local/other institutions using PD
  - Acknowledge possible issues
    - Talk about a timeline for implementation between the various levels and how this would not be an instant upgrade
- Schultz - How to improve clarity around exceptions to the internal proposal deadline and possible areas of flexibility
- Accorsi - Further develop ideas regarding crowdsourcing issues in streamlining the overall submission process
- Myers - Will draft a preamble to the report and discuss with Schultz and Holgerson
  - Will modify existing Google Doc
- Williams/Glasgow/Schultz - Gather data regarding SPS, CLAS, departmental support staff numbers over time; contact Allison Goldsneider for CLAS data

1.20.21

Attendees:

Accorsi, Michael	Glasgow, Michael	Gould, Joni
Holden, Stephanie	Holgerson, Kathleen	Hudobenko, Paul
Lillo-Martin, Diane	Markowski, Maryann	~~Meister, Marie~~
Myers, Emily	O'Connell, Caitlin	~~Pereira Lopes, MiChelle~~
Schultz, Eric	Smith, Amy	Vella, Anthony (Chair)
Venkitanarayanan, Kumar	Williams, Michelle	

Agenda
1. Membership update
   a. Letty Naigles and Michael Lynch had to step down due to scheduling conflicts with remainder of meetings.
   b. Diane Lillo-Martin and Emily Myers are joining in their stead.
2. Review Hudobenko and Gould list of [potential ways to help relieve pre-award](#) workflow pressure points
   a. Training improvement, at all levels (PIs, dept admins; certainly SPS staff, though they also live it every day through their work)

> i. What is dept admin training outreach like? Does Paul's group do it? Can they expand to meet the need?
>> 1. Monthly meeting geared toward dept admins.
>> 2. Program geared toward middle and high-admin rolling out soon.
>> 3. Advertising: If you're touching grants, you hear about training from Research Admins listserv, new initiative training fiscal managers via VP for Finance

b. Concerns of staff dedicated/hired to handle grants ALONE vs. staff handling everything in depts PLUS grants and have capacity

c. Challenges with turnover of staff in centralized/shared-service models, like CLAS', where relationships can't be built
> i. Challenges with the level at which such positions are slotted (intro-level positions)

d. Challenges of understanding roles/middleman position between departmental/school/college grant support staff and SPS proposal staff

e. How do we make sure the language we use exhibits the value we hold for these support staff, especially considering the value UConn places on research excellence?

f. InfoEd - UCH leverages much more of its functionality/capacity than Storrs does; items like Conflict of Interest, project management; from the proposal side, all info is entered *once*, so upon awarding info does not need to be re-entered
> i. Can SPS pilot greater utilization to see if it's more efficient?
> ii. Approval routings can go through it. Such capacity has a cost. Considerable lift, because it would change how SPS does everything. Going electronic would be great and is desirable. Power users love it. Small-time users who struggle with proposal support tasks/InfoEd use tend to be highlighted. (Who sees this highlight?)
> iii. Need to have a demo so we can see how it actually looks/works; lots of faculty struggle with the interface on human subjects modules, so expanding use of InfoEd sounds quite scary to some
> iv. Lots of training! Sometimes those sent to train don't even know, so we really need expert users

3. Review Accorsi and Schultz list of potential proposal sub-categories warranting exception to SPS proposal deadlines
   a. Assess staff training efficacy/success
   b. Clarification of roles and responsibilities for PIs
   c. Develop a sense of shared purpose among PIs and staff vs. sometimes adversarial relationships
   d. Continuously promulgate best practices for both PIs and staff
   e. Consistent and robust communication
   f. A system by which people can raise inefficiencies so that they can be addressed
   g. Expanded services: Plans already in motion inc. large proposal special staff supported (OVPR Research Development Services team of Bethany Javidi and Caitlin O'Connell); grant editing, if you submit well enough in advance; fitting narrative to RFP, incorporating previous reviewer feedback into resubmissions

Action Items

- O'Connell to dive into faculty survey data results, inc. looking at 11% who reported no proposal support, to find out where they live; other issues she identifies
- Jen Przybyszewski (SPS) to look into density of proposal support staff by school/college
- [Williams to polish] Review peer/aspirant institution staff levels, support services offered to address lack of staff capacity (quantity and knowledge capacity; whether dedicated or shared-service model)
  - What problem(s) will each recommendation solve?
  - Be honest about additional burdens will be required, and how the burdens will fall upon
- [Glasgow and Hudobenko to polish] Investing in InfoEd additional functionalities/capacities to improve proposal submission efficiencies, mention explicitly demos prior to commitment and heavy training from expert users
  - What problem(s) will each recommendation solve?
  - Be honest about additional burdens will be required, and how the burdens will fall upon
- [Holgerson to polish] How do we make sure the language we use exhibits the value we hold for these support staff, especially considering the value UConn places on research excellence?
  - What problem(s) will each recommendation solve?
  - Be honest about additional burdens will be required, and who the burdens will fall upon

Report recommendations

- What problem(s) will each recommendation solve?
- Be honest about additional burdens will be required, and who the burdens will fall upon
- [Williams to polish] Review peer/aspirant institution staff levels, support services offered to address lack of staff capacity (quantity and knowledge capacity; whether dedicated or shared-service model)
- [Glasgow and Hudobenko to polish] Investing in InfoEd additional functionalities/capacities to improve proposal submission efficiencies, mention explicitly demos prior to commitment and heavy training from expert users
- [Holgerson to polish] How do we make sure the language we use exhibits the value we hold for these support staff, especially considering the value UConn places on research excellence?
- There are faculty that conduct research sans any staff support, and that is unacceptable.

1.15.21

Attendees:

Accorsi, Michael	Glasgow, Michael	Gould, Joni
Holden, Stephanie	~~Holgerson, Kathleen~~	Hudobenko, Paul
Katsouleas, Thomas	Lynch, Michael	Maric, Radenka
Markowski, Maryann	Meister, Marie	Naigles, Letitia
O'Connell, Caitlin	Pereira Lopes, MiChelle	Schultz, Eric
Smith, Amy	Vella, Anthony (Chair)	Venkitanarayanan, Kumar
Williams, Michelle		

Agenda

1. Opening remarks from President
2. Opening remarks from Tony Vella
3. Opening remarks from Radenka Maric
   a. Important to support faculty research well
   b. Emphasized the NSF audit finding that we need to execute policies we have in place
4. Timeline/important dates
   a. Senate Meeting is March 1
   b. Need to submit final report to Senate Executive Committee (SEC) and Senate Faculty Standards Committee at least 1 week prior to March 1 Senate meeting
      i. Faculty Standards Committee meets immediately prior to full Senate (March 1)
5. Is it reasonable to have a centralized grant submission framework that we have?
   a. Vote on whether - from a 10,000 ft view - the group thinks a submission deadline is necessary. 10 Yes, 0 No, 1 Abstain.
   b. Noted that how-many-day-deadline wasn't specified in the question
   c. UConn currently has 5-working day admin deadline, 3-working day science deadline
      i. There are exceptions already in practice for short-notice opportunities
6. What do our peer institutions do?
7. Impediments
   a. Communication
      i. I.e., Seemed some faculty were quite surprised despite the deadline long being in place
   b. Complex proposal needs
      i. Develop sub-categories warranting exceptions to SPS proposal deadlines
   c. Capacity of staff *outside* of SPS to effectively help on proposals; they try to help, but they don't all have the same knowledge/ability for all funding agencies; also number of support persons, as single individuals are also overwhelmed
      i. We do have a training program rolled out that will be greatly expanded over the course of the next couple of months; available to dept staff
      ii. Need to have an awareness of the workload distribution within and across departments, schools/colleges, and SPS
   d. Proposal review prioritization challenges; currently working on what is due soonest, SPS will be shifting to order of submission (with special exceptions already noted and to-be-developed)
   e. Quantity of support staff, both in departments and in SPS

    f.   The tension among timing and staff support capacity (by numbers and/or expertise)
    g.   How can dept administration help with submitting grants

Action Items
- Accorsi and Schultz to develop sub-categories of grants/opportunities warranting exceptions to SPS proposal deadlines
- Hudobenko and Gould to compile potential ideas of ways to relieve pressure on pre-award staff workflow**?**
- **To be included in the final report**: There are faculty that conduct research sans any staff support, and that is unacceptable.

1.8.21 Prep Meeting

Attendees:
Glasgow, Mike
Holden, Stephanie
Markowski, Maryann
Meister, Marie
O'Connell, Caitlin
Williams, Michelle
Vella, Tony

Notes:
- Timeline: Need to complete in time for March 1 Senate meeting
  - Need to submit to Faculty Standards and Senate Exec committees in advance
- Goal: Executive summary, preliminary recommendations
  - Anything recommended should include school/college self-study
  - Reiterate OVPR's prior research, efforts and subsequent adjustments
- Meeting #/frequency
  - set a schedule in advance
  - meet weekly
  - Really want min. 50% of attendance, but also can't be paralyzed by lack of participation
  - See if we can find a standing time
  - Always have a structured meeting topic

Appendix H: Working Group membership

Anthony Vella (Chair), Senior Associate Dean for Research, School of Medicine

Michael Accorsi, Senior Associate Dean, School of Engineering

Michael Glasgow, Associate Vice President for Research, Sponsored Program Services

Joni Gould, Team Leader and Assistant Director, Sponsored Program Services

Stephanie Holden, Assistant to the Senior Associate Dean for Research, School of Medicine

Kathleen Holgerson, Director, Women's Center

Paul Hudobenko, Director, Sponsored Program Services

Diane Lillo-Martin, Board of Trustees Distinguished Professor of Linguistics

Maryann Markowski, Assistant to the Associate Vice President for Research

Marie Meister, Assistant to the Associate Vice President for Research, Sponsored Program Services

Emily Myers, Co-Director, Cognitive Neuroscience of Communication-CT Training Program; Associate Professor, Department of Speech, Language, and Hearing Sciences, and Department of Psychological Sciences

Caitlin O'Connell, Research Development Specialist, Office of the Vice President for Research

MiChelle Pereira Lopes, Grants and Contracts Specialist, Sponsored Program Services

Eric Schultz, Professor, Department of Ecology and Evolutionary Biology

Amy Smith, Financial Assistant II, Center for Clean Energy Engineering

Kumar Venkitanarayanan, Associate Dean for Research and Graduate Education; Associate Director, Storrs Agricultural Experiment Station; and Professor of Animal Science, College of Agriculture, Health and Natural Resources

Michelle Williams, Associate Vice President for Research