Role of the Principal Investigator

Introduction

While the process of managing sponsored research awards is a shared responsibility between the Principal Investigator and the staff of the Office of Sponsored Projects, both have unique areas of primary responsibility. The purpose of this section of the Manual is to outline those specific responsibilities, present an overview of project management with special emphasis on the Principal Investigator's role in sponsored projects management, and provide Principal Investigator's with the Dartmouth College documentation and forms needed to manage successfully a sponsored research award.

Role of the Principal Investigator

The Principal Investigator has primary responsibility for achieving the technical success of the project, while also complying with the financial and administrative policies and regulations associated with the award. Although Principal Investigator's may have administrative staff to assist them with the management of project funds, the ultimate responsibility for the management of the sponsored research award rests with the Principal Investigator. These fundamental responsibilities of the Principal Investigator during the post-award phase of a sponsored research award include:

- Execute the project as outlined in the funded proposal, using sound management techniques
- Carry out the project's financial plan as presented in the funded proposal, or make changes to the plan following a prescribed set of policies and procedures
- Report project progress to the sponsor as outlined in the terms of award
- Maintain an accurate record of project related expenses
- Comply with all Dartmouth College and DHMC policies and procedures related to project management and personnel practices
- Comply with all applicable sponsor rules, regulations and/or terms and conditions of the award

The Principal Investigator's responsibilities may be divided into two related but distinctly different sets of activities: those activities involving the management of the work of the project, and responsible spending of project funds. While the work of the project should drive the financial activities, sound management practices in both arenas are required. The financial stewardship of sponsored research funds is a shared responsibility with other areas of the College, among them the OSP.

Once a project has been funded, there is the expectation by both the Sponsoring Agency and OSP that the Principal Investigator will responsibly spend the award. Sound fiscal management of sponsored research funds requires knowledge of and adherence to a prescribed set of federal and locally developed financial guidelines. Over the life of a sponsored research award, a
researcher may initiate changes to a project that impact on the management of these awarded funds. A Principal Investigator must have a good understanding of the procedures associated with initiating financial transactions or changes to a sponsored research award's financial plan.

To facilitate Principal Investigators' fulfillment of these responsibilities, the OSP is committed to assisting Principal Investigators in the administration of research and other sponsored activities. In addition to offering workshops and training sessions, the OSP has prepared a number of training and procedural documents aimed at acquainting a Principal Investigator with the policies and procedures that affect the management of a sponsored research award.

**Definition of a Project**

A project is the allocation of resources directed toward a specific set of goals that follows a planned organized approach to meeting those goals. Sponsored research awards have an added explicit dimension of time that sets them apart from many internally funded and managed projects. Most sponsors expect the Principal Investigator to meet the budget and timeframe that were outlined in the proposal. This expectation puts special emphasis on a Principal Investigator's ability to carefully plan and manage the work of the award.

The most basic project-operating document is the project plan. All resource allocation, including funding and staffing, must support the objectives outlined in the project plan. As project manager, the Principal Investigator has three primary responsibilities:

- Managing the resources of the project
- Planning and controlling the work of the project
- Communicating with individuals and groups about the project

While management of project resources may appear to take the bulk of the project manager's time, it is the planning, controlling, and communicating tasks that will prove most time consuming.

Principal Investigators, particularly if they manage multiple awards or complex projects, may find a public domain or commercially available software package to assist in the management of their projects extremely helpful. Use of project management software, such as Microsoft Excel, can assist the Principal Investigator in reporting project progress, tracking work, analyzing project generated data, fund management, and time keeping. Although sponsored research funds are managed by the Dartmouth College accounting system, Principal Investigators are encouraged to develop means by which they or their administrative assistants, can also track expenditures and reconcile expenses with various online accounting reports, such as OGA (Oracle Grant Accounting) Reports. Similarly, the College payroll system will handle the production and distribution of salaries, but the Principal Investigator is still responsible for the day-to-day recordkeeping related to the hours and tasks worked on by each member of the project's team.
Adherence to Certifications

At the time a proposal is submitted, the Principal Investigator will have signed and agreed to a specific set of obligations covering the management of a project's work. Particularly in the case of use of human and animal subjects, these certifications must be thoroughly followed. Failure to follow certification guidelines may result in sanctions imposed by the Dartmouth College Council on Sponsored Activities under the Misconduct in Science Policy.

Conflict of Interest (COI)

Dartmouth College has an institutional policy in compliance with federal requirements, effective August 24, 2012, which it applies to all sponsored projects. All investigators and key personnel are required to disclose at least annually (or more frequently, if new reportable information is obtained during the period of an award) any actual or perceived conflicts of interest to the College which could impact the objectivity of the research proposed.

NOTE: A proposal cannot be processed by the Office of Sponsored Projects without appropriate COI requirements completed.

Project Staff

The Principal Investigator has responsibilities and prerogatives in the selection, training, and evaluation of project staff, subject to the policies and procedures of Dartmouth College's Office of Human Resources. These College personnel policies and procedures conform to federal and state laws, and reflect Dartmouth College's approach to the management of human resources. Consistent with these policies and procedures, a Principal Investigator may select staff to carry out the work of the project. Principal Investigator's unfamiliar with Dartmouth College personnel policies and procedures are encouraged to contact staff in the Office of Human Resources.