



Improving Client Satisfaction by Focusing on What Is Important

Financial Services (Research Accounting)

May 2016



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Financial Services (Research Accounting)

In 2015, Financial Services embarked on a review of the Research Accounting service model. The objective of the review is to improve overall service to the research community within the available resources, while not compromising regulatory compliance obligations.

The approach involves incorporating feedback from the Queen's research community through conducting a client survey and facilitated focus group sessions, as well as benchmarking our service delivery model against other universities to identify best practices that would be effective in improving desired service levels at Queen's.

To date, a client survey has been conducted and facilitated focus group sessions have been held. The resulting themes and areas for improvement are presented in this report.

The next step in this process is to share the report with faculty offices (business officers, associate deans of research) to provide them an opportunity to validate the findings and to provide any final comments. We will then begin investigating and implementing the opportunities for improvement identified through the survey and focus group sessions (see pages 5 and 6 of this report).

By the
Numbers
...

1049 individuals

invited to participate in
survey and focus
groups

259 survey
respondents

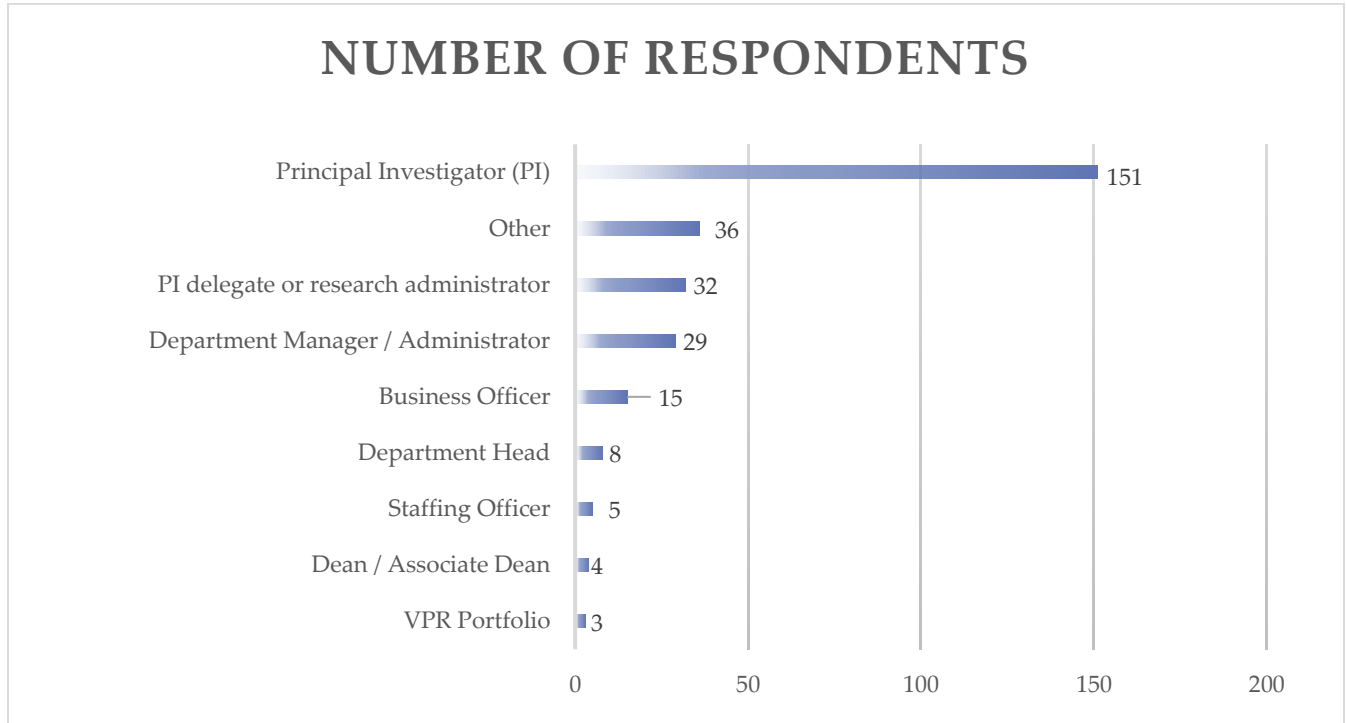
7 focus group
sessions held

25
focus group participants



Client Survey Respondents (1049 invited to participate)

See Appendix 1 for survey questions



Focus Group Participants

Role	Arts & Science	Health Science	Engineering	Research Centres	Total
Principal Investigators	2	2	1	0	5
PI Delegates	2	3	0	2	7
Departmental Managers/Administrators	8	3	0	0	11
Business Officers	2	0	0	0	2
Total	14	8	1	2	25



Overall Themes Highlighted by the Survey and Focus Groups

Structure and Staffing Levels in Research Accounting

In a decentralized support model, it is imperative that Research Accounting and departmental research support personnel work together to support researchers. Equipping research support personnel with training, education, and information needs to be a priority to ensure they are comfortable and feel supported in being first-level support for their researchers.

People generally understand and support how Research Accounting is aligned by funding agency, and do not feel the need for a single point of contact.

There is a recognition that Research Accounting is doing a good job with the resource level in place.

Financial Systems and Reporting

Further enhancements to financial reports and education around interpreting the reports to support decision making at different levels is desired. There is general acknowledgement that FAST is a big improvement, but there still exists a sentiment that systems are difficult to understand, and that PIs don't have the skills or time to do financial work.

Delivering, or pushing, financial reports is desired by some, and the feeling is that there would be more review of reports if this were to happen.

There is a sense that there has been a "downloading" of administrative burden to PIs.

Most people seem to understand that TRAQ and FAST/PeopleSoft exist for very different purposes, and don't feel there is a need to integrate them.

Training & Communications

The training and communication needs and wants vary significantly between stakeholder groups.

PIs seem to desire short, just-in-time, online training to accomplish tasks as easily as possible. Research administrators want more face-to-face sessions and opportunities to learn from Research Accounting as well as each other.

Communications need to be targeted, with short messaging and additional information if desired.



Major RA activities by importance – Survey Results

See Appendix 1 for survey questions

Activity	PI Ranking	PIs who Rated Performance as Good to Outstanding	PI Delegate Ranking	PI Delegates who Rated Performance as Good to Outstanding	Business Officers	Business Officers who Rated Performance as Good to Outstanding
Monitoring Spending to Budget	#1	65%	#4	80%	#3	100%
Financial Reporting & Invoicing	#2	72%	#5	86%	#1	100%
Ensuring Spending is Eligible	#3	71%	#1	75%	#1	100%
Project Establishment & Maintenance	#4	51%	#2	72%	#3	89%
Providing Financial Tools	#5	54%	#6	53%	#2	80%
Preparing Journal Entries	#6	60%	#3	80%	#3	100%
Providing Training & Individualized Support to PIs	#7	58%	#4	75%	#1	75%

Observations

Services rated in the top 3 in terms of importance had satisfaction ratings of 65% or higher.

Differences exist between stakeholders in terms of what is most and least important.

PIs rated training and individualized support as least important, while Business Officers considered this to be very important.



Legend

ST = Short-term (1-9 months)

MT = Medium-term (9-18 months)

LT = Long-term (18 months +)

Opportunities for Improvement

Through the client survey responses, general themes and areas where stakeholders want to see change became evident. Through focus group sessions, these areas were explored in more depth to fully understand what changes and/or enhancements could be made that would make a positive difference.

What we heard	What we plan to do	Timing	Status
Financial Systems & Reporting			
Eliminate the confusion around benefit allocations	Eliminate the benefit allocation in the GL	ST	COMPLETE (News Story)
Better salary reporting including names and GRAF payments	Create a report to include people paid through payroll and accounts payable	ST	COMPLETE (News Story)
Need better understanding of how much money is available	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce reference guide for users to understand what information will be visible at different points of a typical month 	ST	COMPLETE (Availability of Financial Information)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate displaying salary & benefit commitments beyond fiscal year 	ST	PENDING
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate adding a calculation column to the Project Summary report to incorporate Future Budgets and Future Salary Commitments 	ST	PENDING
Create a summarized version of the monthly statement with fewer accounts	Educate community on availability of Research Statement of Operations by Tree	ST	COMPLETE (News Story)
Prevent expenses from being charged to the wrong project	Implement system rules to ensure a 1-1-1 relationship between Project-Dept-Fund	ST - MT	COMPLETE

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Financial Statement with the current reporting year financial information only (not inception-to-date)	Investigate the creation of a report with flexible date range	MT	COMPLETE (Transaction Detail Revenue and Expense report in FAST)
Deliver/push financial reports monthly	Investigate emailing of reports through FAST	MT	PENDING
Prevent over-spending/over-commitments from happening	Investigate budget checking on new salary contracts	MT	COMPLETE – decision made to focus efforts on reporting
Training & Communications			
Research teams need more proactive notification of upcoming deadlines	Roll out automated Project Spending Deadline notices	ST	COMPLETE (News Story)
Shorten month-end close cycle time and clarify when updates can be expected	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Investigate shortened month-end close cycle opportunities 	ST	COMPLETE (refer to Month-end schedule)
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Produce reference guide for users to understand what information will be visible at different points of a typical month 	ST	COMPLETE (Availability of Financial Information)
Assistance in completing the budget template when establishing new projects	Develop training video	ST	COMPLETE (Research Budget Template Video)
Communicate new PeopleSoft project set up requirements with the team members listed in TRAQ	Investigate extracting TRAQ project team members and email addresses	ST	COMPLETE – now part of standard procedure
More training for administrators, and sharing of best practices	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Distribute regular newsletters 	ST	1 st newsletter released
		ST	

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	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Hold Research Administrator Financial Forums 		COMPLETE – 2 nd Forum planned for Sept 2017
A checklist of what needs to be submitted with a claim would decrease cycle time and frustration	Include in newsletter a reference to the existing travel claim checklists available through the Travel & Related Expenses section of the Financial Services website	ST	COMPLETE
Quick access to common questions while within the system	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Develop and publish (on website and in FAST if possible) FAQs 	ST	COMPLETE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Enhance “hover-over” buttons in FAST 	ST	PENDING
Targeted information for new faculty	<p>Explore ways of connecting with new faculty members early in the process to educate and start the relationship off on a positive note, such as:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Attending new faculty orientation sessions 	ST	COMPLETE – session scheduled for Aug 2017
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Working with TRAQ team to identify first-time research applicants 	ST	COMPLETE
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Modifying the New Project Set-Up email template for first-time users 	ST	COMPLETE – new “welcome letter” being sent



Appendix 1

Financial Services, Research Accounting – Client Survey

Please choose which of the following categories you belong to:

Possible selections:

- Principal Investigator (PI)
- PI Delegate or research administrator
- Department Head
- Department Manager/Administrator
- Dean/Associate Dean
- Business Officer
- Staffing Officer
- VPR Portfolio
- Other, please specify

Which Faculty/Department do you belong to?

How often do you deal with the RA Unit?

Possible selections:

- Never
- Rarely(once or twice per year)
- Occasionally (once a month)
- Frequently (once a week or more)
- Who's Research Accounting?

You have indicated that you never or rarely deal with the RA Unit. Please let us know why.

Possible selections:

- I delegate these duties to someone else
- There is someone in our faculty or department who does these duties
- I don't know what Research Accounting does
- Other, please specify

You have indicated that you occasionally or frequently deal with the RA Unit. What is the nature of your dealings with the RA Unit?

Possible selections:

- Project spending/balance details



- Financial reporting/invoicing to funders
- Eligibility/compliance questions
- Recoding of expenses between research projects
- Establishment of new research projects
- Other, please specify

Major activities of the RA Unit

Please rate each of the areas on how IMPORTANT they are to you in your role. You may have more than one of each number. It is not necessary to rank these from 1-5.

1 = Not Important

2 = Somewhat Important

3 = Important

4 = Very Important

5 = Most Important

Possible selections:

- Financial reporting and invoicing to external funding agencies
- Ensuring spending is eligible and compliant with university and funding agency policies
- Monitoring spending to budget
- Research project establishment in PeopleSoft financial system
- Research project maintenance in PeopleSoft financial system
- Preparing journal entries on behalf of researchers
- Providing training to the research community
- Providing financial tools to the research community
- Providing individualized guidance and support to the research community

Please rate each of the areas on ACCURACY. You may have more than one of each rating.

1 = Poor

2 = Fair

3 = Good

4 = Very good

5 = Outstanding

Possible selections:

- Financial reporting and invoicing to external funding agencies

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- Ensuring spending is eligible and compliant with university and funding agency policies
- Monitoring spending to budget
- Research project establishment in PeopleSoft financial system
- Research project maintenance in PeopleSoft financial system
- Preparing journal entries on behalf of researchers
- Providing training to the research community
- Providing financial tools to the research community
- Providing individualized guidance and support to the research community

Please rate each of the areas on TIMELINESS. You may have more than one of each rating.

1 = Poor

2 = Fair

3 = Good

4 = Very good

5 = Outstanding

Possible selections:

- Financial reporting and invoicing to external funding agencies
- Ensuring spending is eligible and compliant with university and funding agency policies
- Monitoring spending to budget
- Research project establishment in PeopleSoft financial system
- Research project maintenance in PeopleSoft financial system
- Preparing journal entries on behalf of researchers
- Providing training to the research community
- Providing financial tools to the research community
- Providing individualized guidance and support to the research community

For each of these areas, please indicate your overall level of satisfaction with the services that you receive.

1 = Poor

2 = Fair

3 = Good

4 = Very good



5 = Outstanding

Possible selections:

- Financial reporting and invoicing to external funding agencies
- Ensuring spending is eligible and compliant with university and funding agency policies
- Monitoring spending to budget
- Research project establishment in PeopleSoft financial system
- Research project maintenance in PeopleSoft financial system
- Preparing journal entries on behalf of researchers
- Providing training to the research community
- Providing financial tools to the research community
- Providing individualized guidance and support to the research community
- Based on your understanding of the resources and services provided, what is your overall satisfaction with Research Accounting?

What can we improve?

How often do you use the RA Unit website?

Possible selections:

- Never
- Rarely (once or twice per year)
- Occasionally (once a month)
- Frequently (once a week or more)
- There's a website???

You have indicated that you never or rarely use the RA Unit website. Please let us know why.

Possible selections:

- I delegate these duties to someone else
- There is someone else in our faculty or department who uses the website
- I didn't know there was a website
- Other, please specify

You indicated that you are a regular user of the RA Unit website. How easy is it for you to find the information you are seeking?

Possible selections:

- Not easy at all
- Somewhat easy
- Very easy



What information do you look for on the website?

Possible selections:

- Funding agency guidelines or contact information
- RA contact information
- Policies and procedures
- Forms
- Training
- Other, please specify

What information would you like to see on the website that isn't currently there?

How often do you go into the FAST financial reporting system to access information about your research accounts?

Possible selections:

- Never
- Rarely (once or twice per year)
- Occasionally (once a month)
- Frequently (once a week or more)
- What's FAST???

You have indicated that you never or rarely use FAST. Please let us know why.

Possible selections:

- I delegate these duties to someone else
- There is someone else in our faculty or department who does this
- I didn't know FAST existed
- Other, please specify

You have indicated that you are a regular user of FAST. Do the FAST research reports meet your needs related to Financial Services, Research Accounting?

Possible selections:

- Yes
- Mostly
- Sometimes
- Infrequently
- Never



Please rate the following for FAST research reports:

1 = Poor

2 = Fair

3 = Good

4 = Very good

5 = Outstanding

Possible selections:

- Understandability of the information
- Ease of use of the FAST research reporting system

How could FAST information improve?

How could FAST reports improve?

Do you have any other suggestions or comments related to the RA Unit that you would like to share with us?

Are there best practices in Financial Services, Research Accounting at other universities that you know of and would like to share with us?