

Research Support Funds (RSF) Subcommittee Meeting

Wednesday, February 27, 2008 at 3 PM in NE-60

RSF Subcommittee: John Elder, Tim Hushen (not in attendance), Stanley Maloy, Skip Meno, Marilyn Newhoff

The purpose of the meeting was to provide SDSU Principle Investigators (PIs) an opportunity to discuss the issues related to the distribution of RSF funds and research space. Dean Maloy made a brief presentation of the committee charge and the recommendations that the committee made in its report. Dean Newhoff presented a summary of Tom Scott's Research Messenger Vol. 11, Issue 5, as well as the overriding themes in the responses Tom received. Dr. Elder gave a brief history of the development of research at SDSU which began in the 1970's. The meeting was attended by approximately 80 PIs.

Presented herein is a summary of the discussion that followed.

- How do Dean's know what space is occupied by grants in their colleges?
- Indirect support has declined over the years.
- Why change a winning model?
- Why does space off-campus cost as much as space on-campus? It should not. Why isn't space considered a Foundation cost? An off-campus rate is needed.
- By holding classes off-campus, PIs save the University money, but are not recognized for this contribution.
- Department staff, supplies, maintenance and grad students support infrastructure.
- Why isn't off-campus space included in indirect?
- The high cost of research space is in part a function of its availability. Is there a way to create a financial incentive to motivate PIs to reduce the amount of space they occupy, thereby increasing availability and reducing costs? Incentives need to work both ways.
- New programs get placed into space occupied by existing projects; yet are charged for space.

- Happy PIs are productive PIs. If the issues surrounding RSF and space are so cumbersome, PIs may be less willing to go through the rigors of obtaining more grants.
- What is the RFs mission?
- Because faculty cannot request space from the RF when developing a proposal, the time it takes to become productive on their grants is prolonged due to the delay in obtaining space once a grant is awarded.
- There are no consequences for SDSURF when there is a delay in service. PIs feel its like going to a parent for money.
- Charges for space vary, making it difficult to budget the cost of space for a 5-year grant.
- Because rent is not fixed, it is possible that all of the indirect is spent on space.
- Colleges with a small number of full indirect grants receive fewer funds.
- In the past, grants housed off-campus were considered full indirect. This model should be reinstated.
- Why isn't the cost of space considered part of the "F" in F&A?
- Why can't commercial space be used if it's cheaper?
- Is this the right time to change the distribution of indirect?
- The RSF Subcommittee Report was given before the state budget was in crisis, when the compact was going to be funded and resources were abundant. The report should be reviewed with respect to the dramatic change in the state's economic environment.
- Some departments/schools indirectly support the infrastructure of research grants by providing supplies and services, while others do not. This is not considered in the distribution of indirect, and should be.
- A number of constraints exist that contribute to making the management of grants on- and off-campus intractable. A method needs to be developed that considers these differences.
- Off-campus, many costs are absorbed by individual PIs personally.

- Some PIs would be more amenable to a straight line split in indirect, rather than absorbing a percent of the cost of supplies/services/equipment.
- In any case, PIs should not be “nickeled and dimed” to death.
- Update current payline. Cost sharing makes PIs more productive.
- If the departments/schools were to receive more of the indirect, this would allow for more grant activity.
- The CSU has brought the RF’s debt limit within the CSU’s parameters. This has had a devastating affect on the RF. Since the CSU does not provide funding in support of research, the RF was created primarily to manage the non-state funds. Support will not be coming from the state. How much of the RF’s budget woes are related to real estate issues?
- In the context of a diminishing state budget, how can PIs get increased funding to support their research?
- In times of budget reductions, research grants have historically rescued departments/schools, using soft money to cover shortfalls. Ultimately, these situations are not corrected because it is assumed that these costs are covered, and projects continue to support state funding deficits.
- The state provides more funding for athletics than it does research.
- A fundamental problem is that PIs feel a lack of power due to the fact they have insufficient representation on the board.
- The indirect return on the total amount of money is so small that some PIs wondered why it is being discussed at all.
- This is the first time that the PIs have met collectively to discuss the RSF Subcommittee Report. The PI Advisory Board meets twice a year; two who serve on the board in attendance. The board did discuss the report, but not in a setting exclusively for this purpose. The report was not made available to PIs who requested it. There was some concern on the part of the PIs that the SDSURF Task Force did not address the right issues. The RSF subcommittee did plead with the full committee to slow down the process, to give PIs an opportunity to provide their input.

A straw vote was taken among those remaining in the room at the end of the meeting regarding the two issues at hand, recognizing that this is not a definitive representation. Seventy-eight percent prefer keeping the RSF distribution as it currently is; 22% preferring the 8% PI / 2% chair split. No one voted for the 2% to the chair with the balance going to the PI, whatever the return rate was.

Regarding space, no one approved of the 80% / 20% proposal. Fifteen percent prefer to keep the cost distribution as is. Eighty-five percent feel that a new model needs to be developed, with the PIs input.

The subcommittee expressed their feeling that this has been a useful conversation, that the PIs raised questions not considered before. Having heard the PIs concerns, the subcommittee feels even more strongly that the report not be presented at the RF Board of Directors meeting on March 7, as Tom Scott currently plans to do. PIs were encouraged to attend the March 7th meeting. It will be held in the Cobble Board Room on the 4th Floor of the Gateway building at 9 AM.

PIs are asked to send an email to Tom Scott expressing their concerns and to copy Marilyn Newhoff. Tom wants to hear from the PIs and if he hears from them, he will take their input seriously.

The minutes of this meeting will be posted online and sent to Tom Scott.