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Operational Excellence in Effort Reporting Project

September 2011 Newsletter

Vision Statement

Implement a compliant, streamlined, electronic effort reporting process by June 2012 that reduces administrative burden on campuses.

Effort Reporting Essentials

How must effort be reported? The federal government does not prescribe a standard method for reporting effort in OMB Circular A-21. However, the Circular does identify specific criteria and provides examples of acceptable reporting methods (e.g., plan confirmation, after-the-fact activity records). By taking this approach, the federal government provides guidance and some flexibility for institutions to develop an effort reporting system that meets the requirements and is the best fit for the institutional structure.

When must effort be reported? The timing of effort reporting is determined by the reporting method the institution chooses to adopt. For example, the plan confirmation method requires that "at least annually a statement will be signed...", and that some form of verification take place whenever there is a "significant change in work activity that is directly or indirectly changed to sponsored agreements..." The after-the-fact activity records method requires that for "professorial and professional staff...each academic term, but no less frequently than every six months. For other employees, unless alternate arrangements are agreed to...no less frequently than monthly..."

Providing Outstanding Sponsored Programs Administration Services and Stewardship

Critical Project Success Factor: An Electronic Solution

Another critical success factor for the Operational Excellence in Effort Reporting project is an electronic effort reporting solution. Huron Education Consulting Group's Effort Certification and Reporting Technology (**ecrt**) solution was selected because it offered a shared service implementation with the flexibility of campus-specific configurations.

ecrt Features

- Offers flexibility needed to accommodate the Research Foundation's (RF) unique effort reporting requirements
- Facilitates institutional compliance, increases productivity and offers useful reporting tools
- Web-based tool designed to be simple for end users

Committed Effort

Committed effort is the amount or percentage of time a principal investigator (PI), co-PI and other key personnel agreed to work on a specific sponsored award. It is not necessarily the actual effort expended, but a projected amount to be achieved over a period of time. Committed effort is offered in a proposal and the actual commitment is identified in the award notice.

Most federally-funded research should have some level of committed faculty (senior researchers) effort, paid or unpaid by the federal government. This effort can be provided at any time (academic year, summer months or both) within the approved project period.

Under federal regulations, institutions are required to have a system to properly track and account for committed effort. To address the need for an automated, consistent process to record and monitor effort commitments the project team will develop a process to enter committed effort data into the Oracle business applications and upload that data to **ecrt**. New reports will capture detailed commitment information as well as any revisions during the period of project performance.

The new **ecrt** system will enhance compliance and provide:

- Comparison and reconciliation of actual salary to committed effort to identify if commitments are met or if appropriate adjustments are needed.
- Effort commitment data on effort reports to allow a more proactive approach to managing faculty effort commitments.
- A committed effort management system that takes full advantage of the **ecrt** features and functionality.

THE RESEARCH FOUNDATION
The State University of New York

Quick Fact

Of the 7,374 fiscal year 2011 sponsored program awards there are 4,186 federal and federal flow through awards. The staff that work on these awards are subject to effort reporting requirements.

Core Campus Team

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University at Albany:
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Project Activities

September 14 Campus Implementation Kick-off Meeting

The Operational Excellence in Effort Reporting project team and the Huron consultants met in Albany on September 14 to kick-off the campus portion of the software implementation. The campus team engaged in an interactive discussion about **ecrt** and identified ways in which its functionality would benefit the overall effort reporting process.

The team thought that **ecrt** presented effort reporting information in a way that will make it easier for PIs to understand how effort is calculated and answer many of their questions.

After reviewing the project and communication plans, the campus team provided feedback on the following:

- Options for who should certify effort in **ecrt** and the pros and cons for each
- Collecting and monitoring committed effort
- Gathering the PI e-mail addresses needed for electronic routing in **ecrt**

Next Steps

- In October and November there will be meetings at each core campus team member's location to discuss the **ecrt** configuration needed to meet the requirements of that campus. These meetings will also provide the opportunity for other stakeholders, such as pre-award staff, to learn more about **ecrt** and its benefits.
- At the joint Sponsored Programs Focus Group (SPFG) / University Colleges Research Council (UCRC) October meeting UCRC members will see an **ecrt** demonstration.
- Continue discussions about committed effort, policies, and roles and responsibilities.

Technical Update

During September the RF and Huron technical teams installed the hardware and software needed to support **ecrt**. As of Tuesday, September 13, **ecrt** was installed and running in a development instance. This instance will be used to configure the final product that users will see once **ecrt** is live. Two more instances will be set up to allow for user testing and the final production environment. The team also began to identify the needed Oracle data elements and how that data will be uploaded to **ecrt**.

Key Project Milestones

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| • November 2011 | System set up needed for implementation |
| • December 2011 | Finalize training plan |
| • January 2012 | Configure and review data |
| • June 2012 | Launch of electronic effort reporting solution |

More Information

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