Cooperative Framework of Institutions and Funding Agencies to Improve Administrative Burden: The story of the Federal Demonstration Partnership (FDP)

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What IS FDP?

“The Federal Demonstration Partnership is a cooperative initiative among 10 federal agencies and 98 institutional recipients of federal funds; its purpose is to reduce the administrative burdens associated with research grants and contracts….”

- FDP website (thefdp.org)

Why FDP? What makes FDP unique and special?

- Federal sponsors and grantees on equal footing, frank and open conversations
- Joint commitment to best science, accountability, minimum “burden”
- Unique forum: Principal Investigators, Program Staff and Administrators “in the same room”
- Hosted by a “neutral convener,” the Government-University-Industry Research Roundtable (GUIRR)
- Funded by federal agencies and dues paid by institutional members

Partners

MEMBERS

- Universities and other non-profit research entities, such as hospitals and independent research laboratories. Membership is voluntary. Diverse in geography, size, population served; public and private.
- Federal Research Funding Agencies Members

AFFILIATES

- Professional Organizations in Research Administration, Consortia of universities such as COGR

OTHER PARTNERS

- Office of Management and Budget; Office of Science and Technology Policy; Research Business Models subcommittee, Grants Policy Committee

- “Friends” - non-member universities & federal agencies, observers

Membership Representation from Grantee Organizations

- Principal Investigators @ Universities (“Faculty”)
- Sponsored Projects Offices/Research Administrators @ Universities (“Administrative Reps”)
- Technical (IT/eCommerce) representatives from Universities

Membership Partners at Federal Funding Agencies

- Program Officers and Managers
- Grants Officers
- Policy Officers
- Financial Management experts
- IT experts

FDP- a brief history

- Early Experiments in reducing Burden
- “Bureaucratic Accretion”
- Florida Demonstration Project
- Federal Demonstration Project- Phase I
- Federal Demonstration Project- Phase II
- Federal Demonstration Project – Phase III
- Federal Demonstration PARTNERSHIP IV
- FDP V-- starting in 2008

What administrative burdens did researchers face in the 1980's?

- Cumbersome requirements to ask agency permission to re-budget, e.g., equipment, travel, carry over funds to next time period, additional time – usually approved anyway.
- PI with multiple grants had to segregate accounts.
- Each agency had different rules, forms
- Few electronic tools in 1980's
- Auditors strict and literal

Early experiments

- Early 1980's
- NSF and NIH
- "Organizational Prior Approval System" (NSF)
- "Institutional Prior Approval System" (NIH)
- Local rebudgeting discretion
- Deemed Successful

“Reducing Bureaucratic Accretion in Government and University Procedures for Sponsored Research”

- Hearing held by Government-University Industry-Research Roundtable June 5, 1985
- Wide representation by senior leadership from federal agencies ***and*** universities
- Holistic view of research funding- pre-award and post-award

Suggestions from Bureaucratic Accretion Hearing

- Pre-award
  - Pre-proposal contact
  - Standardizing Proposals
  - Accomplishment-based awards
  - Longer Funding Periods
  - Take career stage of PI into account
- Post-award
  - Financial Flexibility
  - Broaden “unit of accountability”
  - Delegate prior approvals (like OPAS and IPAS)
  - Standardize requirements
  - Administrative incentives

Florida Demonstration Project

- Two year experiment
- NSF, NIH, Energy, Agriculture, ONR
- Ten Universities (public and private)
- Successfully tested concept of local approvals/decision-making
- Move from procurement to assistance philosophy
- Tested use of common “terms and conditions”

FDP- 1988-2002

- Built on Florida experience to national, voluntary membership
- Expanded authorities available to member schools
- PI Burden survey early 1990's
- 1996-2002-emphasis on adapting to electronic developments- NSF Fastlane, grants.gov, university internal systems, common data elements,

Highlights of Phase IV include

- With OSTP Research Business Models group:
  - FDP exclusive Terms and conditions become standard research terms and conditions!
  - Model research subaward agreement developed and approved
  - Acknowledgement of multiple Principal Investigators
- Substantial feedback by FDP to grants.gov
- Sponsored forums on compliance related issues

Highlights of Phase IV include (continued)

- Burden Survey (Dr. Konstan will discuss)
- Increased membership diversity
- “Spin-off” workshop for smaller schools forming administrative partnerships
- Strategic planning initiative
- Growth of IT specialist participation
- Streamlined audit (“A-133”) compliance

What is a typical FDP "demonstration"?

- **Identification that a new approach is needed**
  (e.g., rule doesn't work, new electronic approach)
- **Experiment is designed to test new approach**
- **Volunteers are identified**
- **Test period**
- **Results are assessed**
- **Outcome could be**
  - **expand new approach more broadly [may require formal rule change through standard channels, usually OMB or OSTP]**
  - **rethink approach (and re-test)**

Key Challenges to sustaining FDP

- Shifting internal priorities at agencies and institutions
- This is a “second job” for most of us
- New legislation = new requirements
- Political leadership change
- Security and technology issues evolving
- Oversight over oversight
- Communications

Strategic Plan before Phase V

- VISION
  - Researchers doing science not administration
  - We have a model partnership
- THEMES
- GOALS and STRATEGIES

http://thefdp.org/phase_5_strat_plan.pdf

Phase V next steps

- Solicitation just released
- Terms and conditions problem “solved”

- THEMES:
  - Maximize the time available for Principal Investigators and scientific staff to focus on research while reducing unnecessary administrative burden.
  - Increase the efficiency of administrative and compliance practices while reducing inefficient or redundant agency and institutional procedures and practices.
- Four key goals

- Be prepared for new elements- policy, technology, new administration, new challenges

Lessons learned so far

- Discuss new things *early*
- Get top level support (tricky because of political turnover)
- Watch for “unintended consequences”- rules with good purposes badly written or badly executed
- Streamline-why are we doing X? is this the best way to accomplish this goal? Does new technology give us new options?
- Meet regularly -- Keep momentum
- Hold people accountable (hard—this is often extra work)
- Surveys are very useful – quick facts-- easy to mini-surveys “on the fly”
- Targeted projects with measurable results do work
- Get all the stakeholders at the table (even auditors ☺)

If we could do things over again…

- Have a more straightforward funding scheme
- Find a way to involve auditors in positive, non-adversarial ways
- Have clearer rules and protocols up front
- Sustained senior agency leadership involvement

Key values

- Keep things
  - Simple
  - Accountable
  - Consistent
  - Balanced
  - Openminded
  - FLEXIBLE

Selected web links for further info

- thefpd.org
- rbm.nih.gov
- research.gov
- grants.gov
- www.nsf.gov

“Domo Arigato!”

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Ask early, ask often

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FEDERAL DEMONSTRATION PARTNERSHIP
FDP

An FDP Demonstration Example

- NSF wanted to switch from paper to electronic signatures (to make application process fully electronic)
- NSF developed a technical on-line solution
- Several FDP schools volunteered to use the new approach for several months
- FDP schools provided NSF feedback about weaknesses of process
- NSF redesigned technical solution and retested
- Electronic signatures became standard for research proposals at NSF
- Grants.gov electronic proposal signatures are based on NSF's approach and the original testing that took place