Finding the Connection: Research Data Management and the Office of Research

by Amanda Rinehart

As our researchers each navigate their own particular research lifecycle and we seek to develop library services to meet their needs, it behooves us to try and understand their entire research process. Fortunately, we're not the only ones interested in our users. Campus offices of research have the mission to assist researchers in getting and managing research funding. These units range from a few people processing grant forms to large and distributed organizations complete with educational programs. In recent years, there have been several case studies of partnerships between the office of research and institutional libraries, both within the United States [1][2][3] and abroad [4][5][6]. By pooling resources, both the libraries and the offices of research get better results.

In particular, the data management plan requirement from U.S. federal funding agencies creates a natural fit between data management librarians and research development professionals. As part of an office of research team, research development professionals work to match researchers to funding opportunities, prepare grant materials, build research teams, interact with funding agencies and provide training [7][8]. As external funding has become more competitive and important to institutional revenue, the National Organization of Research Development Professionals (NORDP) was created to support these individuals [9]. If you peruse their annual conference program, you'll see many topics that overlap with librarian interests: data management, research impact, unique identifiers for researchers, funding agency regulations and digital scholarship.

I've held data librarian positions at three different academic institutions and the office of research has always been a welcome ally. My first position was at a small, research-intensive institution, right after the 2011 National Science Foundation Data Management Plan was announced. I reached out to the local office of research to find out what training opportunities they intended to provide. This contact led to my facilitating a conversation around data ethics at their annual Responsible Conduct of Research training. Topics surrounding data ethics lead to talking about best practices in data management – that poor documentation results in the inability to repeat experiments, that the lack of standards results in isolated data sets and how to implement better practices. Expectations have changed, and now the responsible, ethical researcher consciously engages in good data management practices.

When I took a position at a large, public institution, I again reached out to the office of research, only with different results. At an institution known for developing best teaching practices, data management needed to be embedded into that framework. While there were no obvious joint training opportunities, the director of the Office of Research suggested that I

pursue an internal grant that targeted cross-disciplinary research. In conjunction with a faculty member in political science, I proposed to properly prepare previously digitized U.S. Supreme Court records and demonstrate how this data could be re-used in the classroom. A presentation at the annual university-wide symposium on teaching and learning led to wider campus recognition of how best practices in data management can lead to re-use in the classroom.

In my current position at Ohio State University there are two levels of research development professionals: those at the central Office of Research and those embedded in specific colleges. Reaching out to both has paid off. Collaborating with the central Office of Research has resulted in joint workshops, such as "Getting Grants: Finding Funding and Planning for Data Management." At the college level, I have been conducting specialized events, such as presenting on data management in the responsible conduct of research training for the College of Veterinary Medicine and conducting guest lectures at the College of Pharmacy.

How can you engage with your office of research, and in particular, your research development professionals? First, if you haven't had the opportunity to manage a grant, learn a bit about their language [10] and identify opportunities [11] for collaboration. Consider services that are adjacent to each other on the research lifecycle [12], ask your colleagues for introductions or simply go to their office or set up a time to have coffee. Articulate that you aren't looking to duplicate services and define what you mean by *data* and *data management*. Like all relationships, it may take a bit of time, but the advantages are multifold: the benefits of targeted contact networks, more direct referrals, better timing of events and information and the potential ability to demonstrate value in terms of direct revenue.

Resources

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