University of Michigan
Research Administration Advisory Council (RAAC) Communications Subcommittee

BEST PRACTICES FOR COMMUNICATION

BETWEEN U-M CENTRAL OFFICES AND RESEARCH PROJECT TEAMS

This resource provides tips for communication between the University of Michigan's research project teams and its central offices (e.g., Office of Research and Sponsored Projects (ORSP); Finance-Sponsored Programs, or compliance offices), addressing best practices for universal and traditional communication means as well as via U-M-specific tools like the eResearch proposal management (eRPM) system.

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Effective communication is at the heart of any thriving organization. Each day we ask questions, offer and seek updates, and strive for understanding and good outcomes.

In times of remote work, deadlines, increased work volume, physical barriers, or other stress-inducing challenges, we all can benefit from a refresher on established protocols and clear expectations for communications.

GENERAL TIPS

- Assume each of us has the best intentions.
- Be a good listener.
- Be mindful of body language, facial expressions, and tone in spoken and written messages.
- Set a communication reply goal. If you know you cannot respond within that goal, let the asker know that you will follow up, and estimate when.
- Draft questions in the active voice for clarity.
- Minimize redundant communications (e.g., sending an e-mail to indicate that something was posted in eRPM).
- Check locally. Often questions can be answered internally. Try new U-M Research Administration Forum on Slack. Peer-to-peer support is indispensable.

People who communicate effectively create less friction and experience fewer misunderstandings, saving time and reducing mistakes.

UTILIZE THE 5 WS

Include info on:
Who? What? When? Where? Why?

UTILIZE THE 5 CS

Strive to be:
Clear, Concise, Complete, Correct, and Courteous.

Thanks

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"In a world of constant change, the fundamentals are more important than ever." - James C. Collins

eRPM COMMUNICATION MATRIX

	eRPM Communication Method	eRPM Communication Method	eRPM Communication Method	eRPM Communication Method
	PROJECT TEAM REQUEST ORSP ACTION Use first for PAFs/UFAs.	**POST A COMMENT** Use as an FYI for the record and not for action-oriented items.	**SEND TO PROJECT TEAM FOR CHANGES** For ORSP's use.	**REQUEST ACTION** Use for AWDs.
This eRPM activity is available...	...after the PAF/UFA is routed to ORSP.	...as soon as a new PAF is created, and is available on active Awards.	...once submitted for approval until routed to ORSP, and when ORSP returns PAF/UFA.	...on an Award or UFA that is in the state of Processing or Active.
eRPM Guide URL	http://myumi.ch/yKmZ5	http://myumi.ch/yK5PM	http://myumi.ch/qgd4v	http://myumi.ch/BoRml
When to Use	To request that ORSP take action or make changes to a Proposal Approval Form (PAF) or an Unfunded Agreement (UFA), or send items to sponsor. To share a PAF/UFA status change. Example: pre-award changes; sponsor requests a pre-award rebudget from a principal investigator (PI); to forward Award documents. **Tip:** You need to have Primary Research Administrator status to use this. **Tip:** If there is a sponsor deadline for this request, be sure to include that date at the beginning of your request.	As an "FYI" to create a permanent record in the system, relay small updates, attach documents to PAF/UFA/AWD. To reference or share sponsor communications. To upload final technical report at the end of the award. When instructed by ORSP. **Tip:** Opt to not select email recipients if you are just attaching a document for posterity. If you do select an email recipient, modify the default subject line and/or the comment. **Tip:** Include all necessary information.	This is for ORSP's use to make and submit changes to a PAF/UFA in the approval process. **Tip:** Include all necessary information.	To request that ORSP take action on or make changes to an AWD, create an Award Change Request (ACR). Request Action on the AWD record to either: 1. Request one 22 changes to an AWD such as a no cost extension, approval of UG expenses, change of PI, etc., 2. Request an Other Action from ORSP (such as submit a progress report, add a HUM number to a project, etc.). See: orsp.umich.edu/acr **for more details.**
Results	Each action request moves the PAF/UFA into the ORSP Project Representative's eRPM inbox.	All who have access to the PAF or AWD can see comment, but they have to go into the record to see it. **Tip:** Post a Comment does ***not*** put the request in the PR's work queue, thus, PRs handling coverage will not know if action needs to be taken. Don't use for action-oriented communications.	Generates "acknowledgment request" emails to all previous PAF approvers.	Places the request in the ORSP PR's work queue and can be seen by all PRs handling coverage if that PR is out.
Does it trigger email?	No.	Not necessarily. It's user-directed. An email is sent only if recipient(s) are selected. The comment poster can check/uncheck recipient boxes.	Yes, in every instance used, to everyone with approval access to the PAF.	Yes, the PI, Primary/Additional Post-Award Contact(s), and the ACR creator will each receive an email notification that an ACR has been routed for approval. This process does ***not*** send an email to ORSP, but does arrive in PR's work queue, as described above.
Examples & Scenarios	PI indicates proposal has been turned down; update PAF/UFA docs sent to PI.	Document an issue with a PAF.	Budget revision, indirect cost rate change, effort change, or other event requested by unit.	Budget or effort revisions, indirect cost rate change, or other event requested by unit.

EMAIL VS. PHONE COMMUNICATION MATRIX

Communication Method - Tips for Email

@ WHEN TO EMAIL

When eRPM is not an option, you can draft an email. Do this when...

- ...documentation in eRPM is not necessary.
- ...documentation aids later support and clarification.
- ...clarification is needed before documenting in eRPM.
- ...you need to share correspondence with a sponsor.
- ...you would like to request a Zoom consultation.

. . . & HOW

Always:

- Include all contact information in your signature, including your email and phone number.
- Include relevant U-M reference information, e.g.:
  - Award record (AWD) number;
  - Proposal Approval Form record (PAF) number;
  - Unfunded Agreement record (UFA) number;
  - Project/Grant (P/G) number (for Finance-Sponsored Programs);
  - Principal Investigator (PI) name;
  - Sponsor name and detailed contact information (if requesting that a central office contact them).
- Direct your email to the person you're requesting a response from, using the "To" line appropriately.
- Copy interested parties when necessary, using the "cc:" line and "Reply to All" appropriately.
- Proofread for accuracy, clarity, and tone.
- When forwarding, summarize the action requested in the introduction. Re-iterate the subject in the first line of an email, and include your question.
- Put as much key information in the subject line as possible, including "URGENT" and a "RESPOND BY" time if a same-day reply is needed.
- Time-sensitive messages should describe consequences of a delayed response.

Communication Method - Tips for Phone

☎ WHEN TO PHONE

Picking up the phone (and leaving a voicemail) may help when...

- ...you need a quick confirmation or to speak with someone directly (remember to leave a voice mail).
- ...you are experiencing miscommunication (e.g., still not clear after writing back and forth).
- ...you need to discuss complex situations or when multiple issues need resolution.
- ...you're asked to respond by phone, or you need to speak in real time via phone or Zoom
- ..for urgent matters or same-day requests (and, of course, it is best to plan ahead and avoid these situations wherever possible).

. . . & HOW

Always:

- Leave a voicemail, which will be automatically transcribed and forwarded via email.
- Identify yourself and why you are calling.
- Concisely reference any relevant U-M reference information, e.g.:
  - AWD number;
  - PAF number;
  - UFA number;
  - P/G number (for Finance-Sponsored Programs);
  - PI name;
  - Sponsor name and detailed contact information (if requesting that a central office contact them).
- If you do connect, be sure to ask if it is a good time to speak with the person you've called and indicate how long you think you'll need to resolve the matter (e.g., "Do you have five minutes, or time for a quick call?").