Supporting Early Career Researchers

How the Jefferson Clinical Research Institute Uses InfoReady Review to Support Early Career Researchers

An InfoReady Review Case Study

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Philadelphia's Jefferson Enterprise is an entity comprised of Thomas Jefferson University and Jefferson Health, the latter of which includes 14 hospitals throughout the wider Philadelphia area. That kind of large academic-and-clinical structure can lead to imbalances or conflicts between the research function and the clinical function. Research results may need to be initially supported by the institution and can take years to reach fruition and yield revenue. The clinical function requires clinicians to see 'X' number of patients per day, perform 'Y' number of different procedures per week, and seek reimbursement by a third-party payer.

Research competitions are good…but not funding battles between researchers and clinicians

To avoid the danger of pitting research versus clinical care, Jefferson Enterprise leadership created research processes between the academic clinical innovation and institutional advancement pillars. These establish enterprise-wide administration management of research activities. The goal, essentially, is to establish turnkey operations so that any Jefferson entity can pursue research or clinical trials with reduced barriers to entry.

Among the research units making these goals possible is the Jefferson Clinical Research Institute (JCRI), which is where program manager Claire Chenault, MS is responsible for supporting several programs, including the Jefferson Emerging Medical Research Support (JEMS) Junior Faculty Award.

Research Office administrators understand that supporting junior faculty research is critical to the long-term success of the institution in numerous ways:

- Maintaining continuity and productivity of the institution's research pipeline
- Securing external funding to establish successful careers
- Developing clinical trials leading to medical and pharmaceutical advances

Supporting early career researchers is also vital because these individuals are often pinned between a rock and a hard place: Their own research has yet to be established and funded and, absent protected time and financial support, their salaries typically can't support research activity.

Clinician scientists have the additional need to balance clinical schedules with research time, specifically the need to collect and analyze pilot data. Therefore, the aim of this award was to avoid the rock and hard place dilemma and help some of the Enterprise's most promising early career researchers expedite the growth of their body of research.

Eligibility Requirements

Claire and her colleagues were quite intentional about eligibility because a primary purpose of the award was to feed successful applicant's work into major external funding streams. To that end, they standardized on meeting the NIH definition of clinical research or patient-oriented research. In addition, applicants must have held the title of instructor or assistant professor, been within their first five years of appointment at Jefferson, and must have received active financial support, as verified through their Office for Research Administration.

Additional requirements included identifying a mentor in the applicant's selected area of expertise, although that individual need not be a Jefferson employee. In those cases the Institute did ask that they specifically address the nature of that relationship and how it would be authenticated off campus and in their application materials.

Adapting InfoReady Review for the challenge

When Claire Chenault was put in charge of managing this new award, Jefferson was already using the InfoReady platform, mostly for institutionally Limited Submission opportunities processed through another office. Using InfoReady Review, her objective was to streamline the administrative process burden of managing these internal grants. In her view it was a really good way to move everything into a cloud-based system and manage the documentation through there.

That documentation included a one-page personal statement describing the candidate's long-term goals and demonstrating a compelling case for why the funds are necessary to maintain productivity. Also required was a career development and mentoring plan, comprising projected milestones for project completion over two years ands a detailed list of deliverables generated in scheduled mentorship meetings.

Applicants were further asked to provide letters of support from their mentor and department head so that Claire and her team could verify buy-in and support (collection of requested letters can be automated through the system). They asked for bio sketches from both the mentor and the applicant so individual productivity and the applicant's potential for success could be evaluated – particularly important as the grant's goal is to fast track a

research career. And finally, they requested a five-page research plan to better understand the project and verify it had a high potential for securing external funding and development.

All aspects of this award accept the decision letters were processed into the InfoReady system specifically to ease the administrative burden and streamline the process for the applicants and reviewers.

Here are some thoughts from Claire:

> *“InfoReady is highly customizable and to me pretty intuitive, but there’s definitely a learning curve. That said, creating an application form in Review can take no more work than just listing the requirements on a word doc or a website, yet the platform saves so much time after submission.”*
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> *“You can download spreadsheets of all the scores so you don't need to manually enter and calculate those the reviewer fills out, and it goes right to a spreadsheet. You also don't need to check for missing information because fields marked as ‘required’ won’t allow the submission of incomplete data. The bottom line is that there's no risk of an applicant submitting an application and you realizing they forgot to attach this or fill out this question. There's no forwarding submission materials to reviewers and risk getting having those get lost in a busy inbox. So the reviewers are able to go to their dashboard and check the applicant’s status. And if you and your applicants prefer, you can also have them attach Word documents, PDFs, and other content directly into the form. Basically, you can get as much or as or as little from InfoReady Review as you like.”*
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> *“What’s also really important is that applicants willingly adopt the InfoReady system, so we made it simple. The Research Funding Announcement (RFA) and all subsequent reminders included a general description and eligibility for the grant but directed interested parties to the InfoReady Review page to get the full submission details and requirements -- my idea being to minimize document management versus having the requirements in different places. We made certain to include contact information for questions and I added my email to every announcement and the Review page so people could still reach out to me for clarification and have a human contact. I would say it’s really important to have someone who can quickly respond and be able to troubleshoot via email and phone if you're asking applicants and reviewers to use the Review system one hundred percent themselves.”*
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> *“About the only content we developed outside Review was the decision award letter because we wanted to let applicants see that on our letterhead with a signature from the Vice Provost.”*

“In the future, we plan to introduce monetary tracking type abilities in the system. For example, we want to make certain we're adding the dollar amounts that were awarded. That way, we can if needed go back and run those numbers as well as progress reports through InfoReady. “

“It was rewarding to see there was such high interest in this type of funding. Although we only advertised this award for a couple of months, numerous individuals reached out, including investigators who did not qualify as basic researchers, so we've forwarded that feedback to the appropriate party. Also in the future we will probably provide a little more support for reviewers and make sure everyone is aware of how to review grants, as there were a few instances where people were a unfamiliar with grant review.”

“As we move forward, our researchers are also looking at building a research report card, which would include the different studies researchers have conducted or are conducting, enrollment activity, number of Publications, and so on. Overall, this first round of awards was really successful, and we're going to look and see what the progress reports tell us, but there's a good possibility we'll be expanding early career internal funding mechanisms in the future. With InfoReady Review in place, the ability to do that, and successfully manage it, is virtually unlimited.”

To learn more about Review, schedule a demo, or get in touch with current Review users, contact Amanda or Max at the contact info below.

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