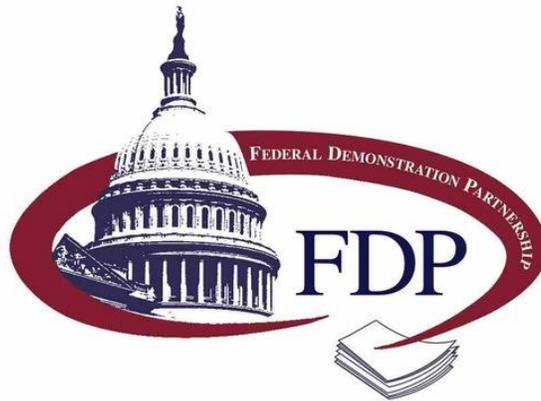


FEDERAL DEMONSTRATION PARTNERSHIP (FDP)



2012 Faculty Workload Survey EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Sandra L. Schneider, Principal Investigator. University of South Florida

Kirsten K. Ness, St. Jude Children's Research Hospital

Sara Rockwell, Yale University

Kelly Shaver, College of Charleston

and

Randy Brutkiewicz, Indiana University

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The full report is available from the FDP at <http://www.thefdp.org>

or by contacting David Wright, FDP Executive Director, at DWright@nas.edu.

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Executive Summary

The Federal Demonstration Partnership (FDP; Phase V) is a cooperative initiative among 10 federal agencies and 119 institutional recipients of federal funds, sponsored by the National Academies, with a purpose of reducing administrative burdens associated with federal research grants and contracts. In early 2012, the FDP conducted a survey of principal investigators (PIs) of federally-funded projects to determine the impact of federal regulations and requirements on the research process. This was a follow-up survey to the 2005 FDP Faculty Workload Survey of 6,295 federally-funded investigators (see Decker et al., 2007). In the current survey, responses were obtained from 13,453 PIs (representing a 26% response rate; 12,816 with complete data) with active federal grants during the 2010-11 academic year from 111 (non-federal) FDP member institutions. Respondent characteristics were remarkably similar across the two time periods.

Overall, PIs reported that almost half of their available research time for federal projects had to be allocated to project-related requirements instead of the content of their research projects. PIs estimated that an average of **42% of their research time** associated with federally-funded projects was spent on **meeting requirements** rather than conducting active research. These results are remarkably similar to those found in the 2005 FDP survey, suggesting little change since the original survey was conducted.

According to PI estimates, research time spent on obtaining and completing federally-funded projects is roughly divided as follows:

| | |
|----------------------------------|--------------|
| Proposal preparation | 15.4% |
| Pre-award administration | 5.7% |
| Post-award administration | 13.6% |
| Report preparation | 7.6% |
| Active Research | 57.7% |

In addition to proposal and report preparation requirements, as many as **23 different pre- and post-award administrative responsibilities** were identified within the survey. Researchers reported having to deal with an **average of 8.67 of these responsibilities** within the one-year time frame of the survey. Researchers estimated that **additional administrative assistance could reduce their time spent on administrative responsibilities by an average of 27%** (from an average of 42% to approximately 31%). In absolute terms, researchers estimated that with adequate administrative help roughly **4 hours per week** might be reclaimed for active research.

Sources of and Differences in Administrative Workload

The most commonly experienced administrative responsibilities included those related to federal project **finances, personnel, and effort reporting**. These were also among the most time-consuming responsibilities. For researchers engaged in projects that required **human or animal subjects**, the related **IRB** (Institutional Review Board) and **IACUC** (Institutional Animal Care

and Use Committee) **requirements** were by far the most time-consuming. Other areas viewed as particularly time consuming were those involving **clinical trials, subcontracts, and cross-agency differences**. Since 2005, we observed increases in the proportion of respondents reporting substantial time devoted to federal project finances, personnel, and patent/copyright applications, and slight decreases in the proportion reporting substantial time required to meet HIPAA (Health Information Privacy and Accountability Act) requirements and to complete IRB training.

Administrative workload differed as a function of **respondent characteristics** including respondent's administrative role, field of study, research assignment, type of project, funding source, amount of funding, and type of institution. These differences were most pronounced in the areas of post-award administration and then interim/final report preparation. There were also small but notable differences in administrative workload as a function of race, sex, and age.

Administrative Workload Profiles

Several **administrative workload profiles** were identified with the help of principal components analysis.

- Only **6%** of respondents reported **relatively few** systematic administrative requirements, which resulted in an average estimate of **31% time taken away from research** (for instance, by proposal and progress/final report preparation).
- **27%** of respondents experienced only the most **common requirements** of project **finances, personnel, and effort reporting**. Their estimate of time taken from active research averaged **40%**, with a steep **increase for post-award administration** time.
- **42%** of respondents experienced the common requirements as well as a **targeted set of requirements** having to do with one of the following: **human subjects, animal subjects and laboratory safety, general compliance, or contract-related** requirements. These groups averaged a **43% estimate of time taken away from research**.
- **25%** of respondents were categorized as having a **heavy administrative workload** in which they had to respond to two or more of the targeted workload areas plus the possible addition of administrative requirements having to do with **national security**. These respondents estimated that about **46%** of their **time** was taken **from active research**.

As workload increased from the common requirements, large increases were seen in proposal preparation time and in pre-award administrative task time. Estimates of **potential time savings with the addition of administrative assistance** increased as administrative workload increased. Average estimates ranged from a possible **20% to 40% reduction** in administrative time, with absolute estimates in time savings of **between two and six hours per week**.

Specific Workload Responsibilities

An analysis of specific workload responsibilities and associated frustrations provided additional detail, and highlighted several areas that might be the focus of attempts to streamline

administrative requirements related to federally-funded research. Both quantitative and qualitative measures were used to identify areas of focus. These included ratings of specific tasks and content analysis of comments about major frustrations.

More than 25% of over 6,000 comments included either **proposal or report preparation as one of the most frustrating responsibilities**. In addition, over 1,300 comments discussed aspects of requirements regarding the management of **finances** on federally funded projects. Over 800 discussed frustrations having to do with **human subjects/IRB** review requirements, and over 600 discussed frustrations about **animal care and use/IACUC** requirements. The large number of comments regarding human and animal subjects is especially noteworthy given that only a minority of respondents dealt with human subjects (44%) or animal subjects (25%).

Emergent themes were also identified within the frustration comments. Over one-third of the frustration comments targeted **institution and agency roles**. Another theme evident within a third of the comments was a plea to end **needless administrative complications** and thereby reduce the amount of **wasted research time**. Other less common themes included issues related to **training**, concerns about **problematic electronic systems/forms**, and complications related to obstacles associated with **international research**.

Implications on Climate for Research

When asked about the **perceived climate for research**, respondents generally confirmed their commitment to their own academic careers; however, many also agreed that the administrative workload associated with research is **discouraging students from pursuing academic careers**. Most respondents agreed that administrative workload associated with federally-funded research has increased in the past 5 to 6 years, and that the workload would seem more reasonable if **funding rates** at federal agencies were higher. Although only one fourth of the respondents reported that they were less likely to submit federal grant proposals now than in the past, many were concerned that the **time spent meeting federal requirements for research may not provide benefit worth the cost** and that **many federally-mandated requirements may not accomplish their intended goals**. Responses also reflected the **desire for better methods for understanding and complying with federal regulations**. To the extent that comparisons with responses to the 2005 survey were possible, it seemed that perceptions remained generally similar over time.

Emergent Themes

An analysis of the roughly 3,000 **open-ended general comments** provided at the end of the Faculty Workload Survey revealed several overarching concerns. Over 1,000 comments focused on **broader issues** concerning the **viability of scientific research and research careers** in the current funding environment. Between the threat of **inadequate funding** and **ever-increasing administrative workload**, respondents maintained that it is becoming harder and harder to persuade students to pursue a research career. Over half of the open-ended final comments

included some type of elaboration about the **impact of administrative workload** and/or the need for **effective support staff**.

Conclusions and Recommendations

Reducing the administrative workload associated with federally-funded projects is critical for increasing the **efficiency and effectiveness of research**. The current levels of administrative workload routinely reduce the **ability of highly qualified scientists to focus on the content of their research**. Different kinds of research are subjected to different amounts and types of administrative workload, suggesting that solutions may not be the same in all cases. Nevertheless the need for **larger-scale solutions**, in addition to more **focused initiatives**, is clearly evident by the growing frustration with the sense that **valuable research time is being wasted**, and that heavy administrative workloads coupled with the uncertainties of research funding are threatening the viability and attractiveness of research career paths.

The Federal Demonstration Partnership (FDP) can play a key role in identifying potential answers and in demonstrating the value of proposed solutions. Even with respect to larger scale issues, the FDP can work with federal agency partners and member institutions to emphasize the need to:

- (a) factor in impacts on **research quality and productivity** when weighing the costs and benefits of research policies;
- (b) strengthen research programs by **minimizing distractions, interruptions, and an environment of uncertainty**; and
- (c) **reduce disincentives for conducting research** and following a research career path.

The FDP can also be a leader in assisting member institutions to promote a **healthy research culture** internally. A primary goal is to find a healthy **balance between facilitating research and protecting against audit and legal concerns**. For example, FDP demonstrations could show the value of targeting high risk conditions and high likelihood problems, with reduced workload in more benign situations. FDP demonstrations have been routinely aimed at **preventing the waste of valuable research time**. The FDP's continued success will be bolstered to the extent that member institutions, as well as federal agencies and others, adopt this goal as a priority.

The 2012 FDP Faculty Workload Survey provides a **rich resource for targeting specific issues** that have a substantial effect on administrative workload. Both quantitative (ratings) and qualitative (comments) data are available to help **guide FDP demonstration projects**, as well as to confirm the existence and impact of issues related to administrative workload on federally-funded projects. As a unique forum, the FDP is especially well-positioned to engage in collaborative projects with institutions and agencies to find ways to alleviate the most pressing of these problems.