

# **RISK ACCOUNT PROCESS IMPROVEMENT**

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**PURPOSE:** THE GOAL OF THIS PROJECT IS TO IMPROVE THE PROCESS FOR REQUESTING A NEW GRANT ACCOUNT OR EXTENDING AN EXISTING GRANT ACCOUNT UNDER RISK. RISK ACCOUNTS ARE REQUESTED TO ALLOW AN EXTERNALLY FUNDED PROJECT TO BEGIN OR CONTINUE WHILE THE OFFICIAL AWARD DOCUMENTATION IS FINALIZED.

## **KEY GOALS/INTENDED OUTCOMES:**

- REVIEW THE CURRENT PROCESS
- IDENTIFY AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT
- LEARN HOW OTHER OFFICES VIEW AND EXPERIENCE THE PROCESS
- IMPLEMENT AND ADVOCATE FOR IMPROVEMENTS TO THE PROCESS
- PROVIDE THE BEST POSSIBLE GRANTS MANAGEMENT EXPERIENCE FOR THE COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES
- SUPPORT FACULTY AND THEIR RESEARCH



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# **PROJECT SPONSORS**

**JOEL SAMUELS, DEAN**

**JEFF TWISS, ASSOCIATE DEAN FOR RESEARCH**

**ALYSIA BRIDGMAN, ASSISTANT DEAN FOR GRANTS OPERATIONS**

**COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES**



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# **TEAM MEMBERS**

**ALYSIA BRIDGMAN, ASSISTANT DEAN FOR GRANTS OPERATIONS**

**BILL CASE, GRANTS MANAGER**

**SHANNON LACKEY, GRANTS MANAGER**

**WADE LUTHER, GRANTS MANAGER**

**ALICIA STOLL, GRANTS MANAGER**

**COLLEGE OF ARTS & SCIENCES GRANTS OPERATIONS**



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# **SUBJECT MATTER EXPERTS**

**NIDA REID, DIRECTOR, SPONSORED AWARDS MANAGEMENT**

**DENISE KOON, SENIOR DIRECTOR, GRANTS & FUNDS MANAGEMENT**

**LINDSAY CRAWFORD, ASSISTANT CONTROLLER, CONTROLLER'S OFFICE**

**KIM DWIGGINS, LEAD AUDIT MANAGER, AUDIT & ADVISORY**

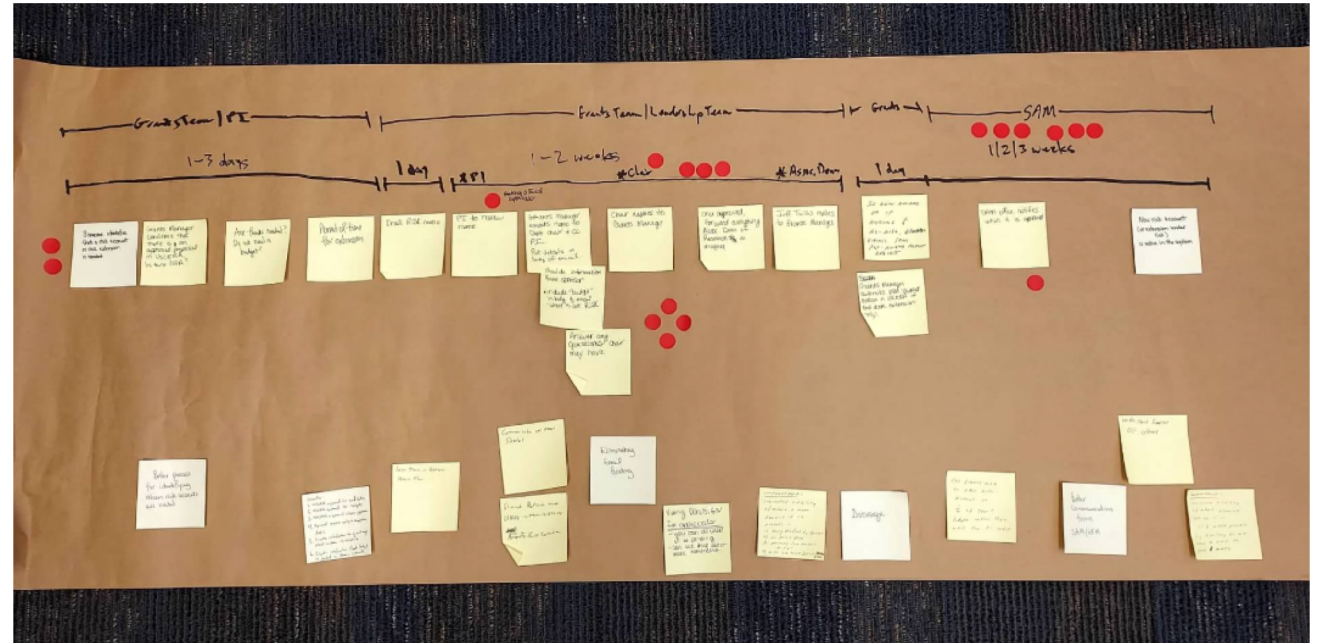
**LINDSEY COX, DIRECTOR OF COMPLIANCE AND TAX, CONTROLLER'S OFFICE**



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# PROJECT PATH: DISCOVERY

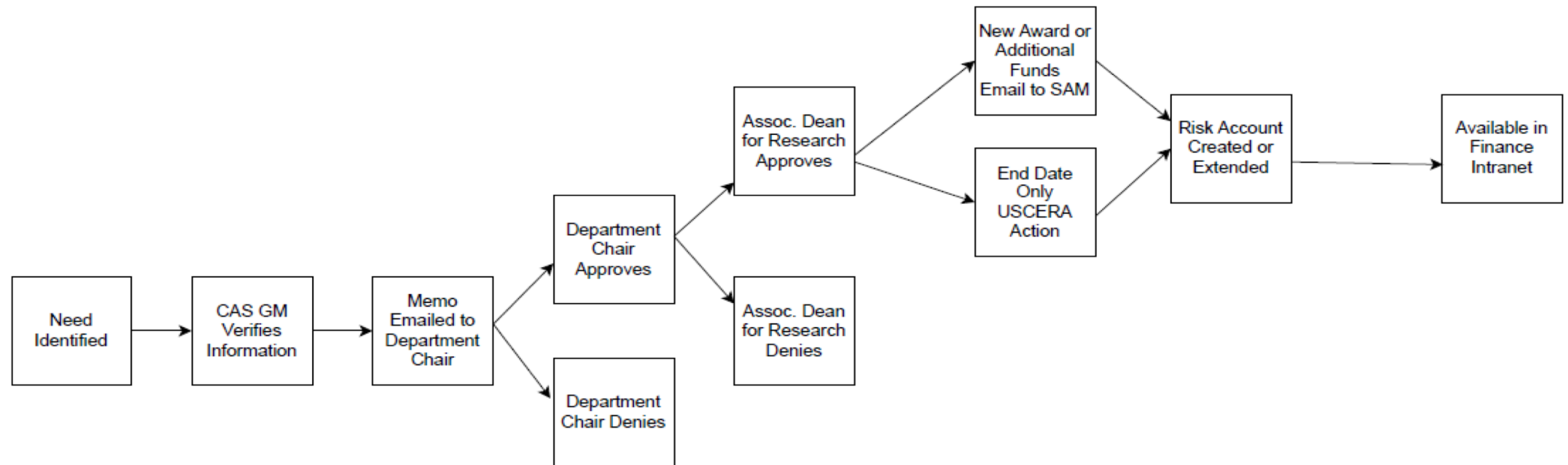
ON OCTOBER 30, 2024, THE PROJECT TEAM MET WITH BUTCHER PAPER, YELLOW STICKY NOTES, AND RED DOT STICKERS TO MAP OUT THE PROCESS AND MAKE IT VISIBLE. THERE MAY HAVE BEEN CUPCAKES INVOLVED AS WELL.



1-5 Days

1-3 Weeks

1 Week



# IDENTIFIED AREAS FOR IMPROVEMENT

- Better method for identifying need for risk account/extension.
- Accounts established with full project dates rather than year-by-year.
- Visibility of status of new award from sponsor to account in USC system.
- Visibility of status of risk account/extension requests.
- Eliminate email routing.
- Too many different systems involved.
- Amount of time from request to account established/extended in system.





# CONVERSATIONS WITH EXPERTS:

- A new system (HURON) to replace USCERA is on the horizon and should include electronic routing for risk account requests/extensions.
- Making changes to USCERA in the meantime is not feasible.
- There are some other system limitations overall that cannot currently be addressed.
  - There is no foolproof way to identify all projects currently under risk, but there are queries to help.
  - There is some manual data entry into PeopleSoft required for new accounts and for account changes.



# CONVERSATIONS WITH EXPERTS:

- Notification of a new award usually goes to the Principal Investigator (PI) first and there is no central way to track this.
- Establishing new accounts with full project years instead of year-by-year may be happening in the future, as long as sponsor restrictions are met. Discussions are ongoing with SAM & GFM.
- A recent audit conducted by the University revealed that the College of Arts & Sciences has a good process and timing for risk account requests and extensions.



# A LOOK AT OTHER UNIVERSITIES:

Most universities have an electronic routing system similar to USCERA/HURON and risk account requests/extensions are a part of that system. Examples:

- Harvard: [At-Risk Account Guidance | Office for Sponsored Programs](#)
- University of North Carolina

[Internal Processing Form \(IPF\) Submittal Guidance | OSP | Office of Sponsored Programs](#)

Those who do not have an electronic system are using a paper and email routing system like ours.

Clemson: [risk-extension-request-form-2024-07-10.pdf](#)



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# PROJECT PATH: POSSIBILITY

- Develop a standard operating procedure for our College including a written guideline of steps for the risk account process.
- Develop a standard form to replace the memo currently used.
- Consider a software system for risk approval routing in the College of Arts & Sciences.
- Request risk accounts for all new awards once we have written documentation of approved funding.
- Request extensions under risk for all accounts with a year ending date in the next 30 days when a new year of funding is expected.



# PROJECT PATH: POSSIBILITY

We conducted an effort impact analysis and decided that a standard form and procedure were good investments of our time.

While we investigated software systems to support electronic routing for approval within the College of Arts & Sciences, we determined the time and resource investment to implement their use did not seem worthwhile.

We also determined that a sweeping approach to establishing risk accounts or extensions would not be effective.



# KEY IMPROVEMENTS

## Current State:

- Memo that varies
- Procedure that is generally known but not documented
- Request routed by email for approvals
- Multi-year awards with end dates for the current year

## Future State

- Standardized form that clearly provides information needed for approvers to evaluate
- Standard procedure that is documented and accessible
- Electronic routing for approvals in HURON system
- Multi-year awards established with account that covers the entire project period and eliminates the need for risk accounts to cover the gap between receiving funding for the next year



# RESULTS SO FAR

- Spending time reviewing and mapping the process led the Grants Team to critically review one of our processes, identify improvements and search for better ways to serve our faculty.
- Talking with leaders in University offices helped us understand their role in the process, how the process works beyond our reach, and about some future improvements already in the works.



# RESULTS SO FAR

- Those conversations also confirmed:
  - we have shared concerns with other offices
  - our current process is a good one, even if it still has room for improvement
  - many key factors are currently beyond our control
- A draft standard form and guidelines are under review to ensure that all risk account requests/extensions are handled as uniformly as possible.





# NEXT STEPS WITHIN OUR OFFICE:

- Finalize the Risk Account/Extension Request Form
- Finalize the Standard Operating Procedures
- Begin using the form for new and extension requests
- Save the form and procedures in our shared Grants folder for easy access and referral



# NEXT STEPS BEYOND OUR OFFICE:

- Stay in communication with the Sponsored Awards Management and Grants & Funds Management Offices to learn about updates and offer to help with piloting and testing new features in Huron and other changes.
- Continue to navigate the new set of challenges that emerged as January 2025 brought stricter focus and heavier weight to the idea of making charges under risk on federally-funded research grants.



# REFLECTIONS

- Participating in the Process Improvement Program has been an amazing experience led by amazing people who are experts at what they do.
- Everyone should use sticky notes, sharpies and red dot stickers to map out the processes in their life.
- I encourage my colleagues to participate in future cohorts.
- One of the most valuable lessons has been the power of conversations with people involved in a process. I hope we can continue to find opportunities to discuss what we do and why, and how we can do it better.



# THANK YOU!

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