Fearless ideas

BRAKE

boundaries

By Beth Brittan-Powell and Denise Clark
ne morning, Denise said, “I have this idea. You know how Maryland wants to increase international collaborations. I know how we can help researchers streamline the administration.”

And, that big idea sparked the beginning of an innovative initiative at the University of Maryland, College Park (UMD) known now as BRAKE: Borderless Research Administration Knowledge Exchange. In the lab, the buzzword is “transformative.” To Denise, transformative is just normal thinking. She’s a “go big or go home” kind of person.

**So, what is BRAKE?**

BRAKE is an administrative training program—a unique, proactive approach to overcoming barriers to enhancing international partnerships. This is more than just an idea; the UMD Division of Research provides the infrastructure support to make this a reality, with an investment of both people and funds.

The mission of BRAKE is to facilitate research collaborations by reducing administrative obstacles for researchers, in turn strengthening UMD’s position as a top-tier global research institution. BRAKE builds a culture at UMD and its partner institutions that not only encourages joint proposal endeavors but also joint research administration and researcher exchange programs.

**How does BRAKE work?**

BRAKE engages international institutions as strategic cohorts and focuses on building expertise in the management and oversight of U.S. federal funding. To do this, BRAKE faculty provide face-to-face training in the following areas: Uniform Guidance – What does it mean for Foreign Entities: Pre- and Post-award and Responsible Conduct of Research (RCR) – the Foreign View.

Additionally, UMD BRAKE faculty meet with administrative colleagues at host institutions around the world to provide an in-depth assessment of the attending institutions' administrative infrastructure to foster a culture of compliance with all federal regulations.

While onsite, UMD BRAKE faculty tour facilities and meet with faculty researchers to take the first steps to developing bilateral collaborations with the partner institution.

**What does this do for researchers?**

BRAKE builds a foundation: a solid groundwork for collaboration at every level of the research endeavor. By focusing on fortifying the framework required for successful research administration, we provide a valuable service to our researchers, in some cases even before they start working together.

**Case study**

In early 2015, Denise and I started working with research development partners at Lund University and introduced the BRAKE initiative workshops. We were able to tie a visit to Lund into an existing meeting in Europe in May of 2015. During our 3-day visit, we presented workshops on the Uniform Guidance and NIH for Foreign Investigators. Administrative discussions led to the completion of an onsite audit by Denise that in turn allowed for an in-depth risk assessment to be completed by our sponsored research office. The fact that Denise had spent time at Lund, met the research administration team, and provided in-person training allowed a lower risk designation for future research proposals between UMD and Lund and established a foundation of collaboration at the administrative level. In addition to the workshops, we met with numerous researchers and visited facilities in Lund, which allowed us to identify their areas of research strength. Once back in Maryland, we met with our researchers whose interests matched those in Lund. We set up a Skype date between eight researchers and administrators to discuss potential areas for collaboration. While many entered the room skeptical, all left enthusiastic for the next call. After several Skype dates, the Division of Research at UMD committed travel funds for four UMD researchers to go to Lund to meet face-to-face with their Skype colleagues, an essential part of the process. Additional Skype discussions and a trip to UMD in February 2016 from Lund administrators set into motion a call for research workshops that was sent out in July with a September deadline. It was amazing to see what a year can produce with BOTH sides working together all at levels of the research enterprise. We look forward to sharing the outcomes of the research workshops!

**Tracking our progress**

To date, UMD has engaged in onsite training with global research partners in locations across the world, including Australia, New Zealand, Sweden, Denmark, Israel, and the Netherlands. In FY17, we plan to extend BRAKE’s outreach to Mexico, South Africa, Dublin, and Hong Kong.

As a result of these exchanges, UMD is positioning itself as a leader in the field of research administration and building a solid global reputation for a culture of compliance with all federal regulations.

To learn more and participate in BRAKE, visit: research.umd.edu/international

**Beth Brittan-Powell** is Director of Joint Research Collaborations at the University of Maryland College Park (UMD), and is responsible for the management and promotion of key research collaborations. Beth has extensive experience with the grants development process through her work as the Grants Development Specialist for UMD's Neuroscience and Cognitive Science Program. She also has over 20 years of experience as a researcher in UMD's Laboratory of Comparative Psychoaoustics. Beth received her B.S., M.S., and Ph.D. from the University of Maryland College Park. Beth can be reached at ebrittan@umd.edu

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Creative Collaborations

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