

The Wide, Wide World of I/UCRC Operations Part 1: The Roles

Introducing
T. Avery (“T.A.”) Walton



I/UCRC Annual Director's Meeting
January 12, 2012

Introducing: T. A. Walton

- Functional Title: Managing Director, GRAPES I/UCRC
- Location: University of Arkansas, Fayetteville
- Administrative Title: Research Associate
- Number of years in this role: Two and one-half
- I/UCRC operations responsibilities:
 - Center Operations
 - IAB Relations
 - Center Management
 - Marketing and Communications

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- Full-time or part-time? part-time (Approx. 25%)
- If part-time, what else do you do?
 - **Managing Director**, National Center for Reliable Electric Power Transmission (NCREPT) - \$4.5M high-power electronics test facility in the Arkansas Research Technology Park
 - **Diversity Outreach Director**, Vertically Integrated Center for Transformative Energy Research (VICTER) – multi-university center focused on the development and integration of materials and technologies associated with renewable energy under NSF-EPSCoR

Introducing: T. A. Walton

- How are you paid?
 - I/UCRC ARRA funds, corporate foundation grant funds, state and federal funding
- Describe how you came to do this job for your center.
 - Educational Background: BS and MS Degrees - Chemical Engineering
 - Industry Experience: 27 years. After two weeks I decided retirement was NOT for me...not yet! Started two months later with UAF.
 - Educational and Industrial experiences provided a unique background and skill set for this role.
 - R&D – Product Development
 - Operations – Unit Operations, Personnel, Public Affairs, Safety, Budgets
 - Sales and Customer Development – Senior Account Executive on a Global Team

About Our I/UCRC

- NSF I/UCRC for Grid-connected Advanced Power Electronic Systems (GRAPES)
 - Date established: 2009
 - Number of sites: Two
 - Lead Site: University of Arkansas – Fayetteville, AR
 - Other site: University of South Carolina – Columbia, SC
- A sentence describing what your center does
 - The mission of this center is to accelerate the adoption and insertion of power electronics into the electric grid in order to improve system stability, flexibility, robustness, and economy.

About Our I/UCRC

- Does this center have a Deputy Director? No
- Other operations support? Yes
 - Part-time Administrative Support Supervisor (UA-90%)
 - Part-time Program Coordinator (USC- 10%)
 - Part-time Project Manager (USC - 10%)
- Anything else unique about your I/UCRC you'd like us to know?
 - Center Evaluator: Dr. Don Davis, Old Dominion University
 - Guided by an Industrial Advisory board (21 members)
 - Nine Principal Investigators and one Adjunct Professor
 - 40+ graduate and undergraduate students supported by GRAPES projects, including two fully funded Fulbright International Scholars

My Responsibilities

- Customer service and satisfaction
- Management of the ever-changing dynamics of a center with nine professors and 40+ students on two campuses
- Partner with Executive Director and Site Directors to address strategic center challenges, budget concerns
- Recruiting and marketing our center at trade expos
- Website content and external communications

My Responsibilities

- Report compliance (data for Annual Reports, Evaluator Reports)
- Onboarding new members
- Ongoing communications with Principal Investigators
- Ownership of Bylaws and other central documents
- Coordination of resources to execute effort-intensive responsibilities (compliance reporting, semi-annual meetings, webinars, etc.)

What works well for me?

- The flexibility of having multiple resources (even though part-time). This helps manage peak load periods
- The benefit of having team members with diverse backgrounds – it helps us get a 360-degree view as we deal with complex issues
- The benefit of excellent relationships and cooperation with faculty and staff on both campuses

What works well for me?

- The benefit of a supportive IAB and IAB leadership chairs who have a bias for action
- The benefit of open communication with Center Executive Director and Site Directors
- The timeliness of L.I.F.E. Form feedback in impacting direction
- The benefit of a responsive and helpful Center Evaluator

What has worked not so well?

- Allowing variation in membership start dates or agreement details... it helps to keep these variations to a minimum.
- Allowing varying choice of payment schedules for member dues... it makes budgeting and cash flow more difficult to manage and to track.

What has worked not so well?

- Predicting how economic factors will affect future membership levels and cash flow. We reached our two year anniversary point without any member losses; however, it is an ongoing discussion topic that requires vigilance.
- Overbalancing academic optimism vs. business practicality, particularly as it relates to determining the proper level of forward funding requests vs. commitments on multi-year research projects.

Other things we'd like you to know...

- Customer satisfaction is delivered not only through the research done, but in a great part through operations.
- Staffing and resourcing the operations portion of the center with individuals with a high “ownership component” is key. Operations is the “face” of the center that customers see.
- We have learned that as work ebbs and flows one might think that it is ok to under-staff, only to find out that one does not have the ability to deliver with quality during the peak effort load periods.

Closing Thoughts

- A network of part-time resources has been our approach to the challenge (this is not proposed as a “universal solution”).
- Our center’s design developed through an evolution of thought processes.
- We continue to evolve and re-invent ourselves. We take an “entrepreneurial team” approach to our work.
- Our team synergies continue to grow as we gain experience in the work.

Questions?

