ORPP&E Webinar

Date: February 18, 2021

Session: VA Research Budget Management – Part 1

Presenter: Tony Laracuente, Allen Dunlow, and Kari Points

Tony Laracuente: Thank you Soundia and thank you, Kate, for helping us set this up. And I also want to thank this team who’s put this together; Allen Dunlow, Renee Chartrand, Erin Olson, Jamece Petteway, Kari Points, Diana Powers, and Tabitha Randall. We spent probably the later part of two months working on this and trying to come up with the best way to present this to you all and really focusing on, on fiscal management and so forth. So, today, is session one, and it’s really a general overview. And again, I think this is the beginning of a series of trainings that will focus on fiscal management, both from the ORD perspective and the field perspective. As we go along, we want to start out by trying to get an idea of who the audience is today. We’re going to have two questions for you, and these are poll questions, so let’s go ahead and start the poll.

[Silence from to 1:00 to 1:16]

Soundia: The poll’s been launched, please make sure to hit the submit button so that we can record your response. Thank you. There’s about 10 seconds left.

[Silence from 1:24 to 1:35]

Tony Laracuente: Okay. So, this poll is ended and looking to see if we have the responses. Soundia, I don’t see the responses, can you read them out to us?

Soundia: It’s taking a second for it close it.

Tony Laracuente: Okay.

Soundia: Add the few additional minute, so\_\_

Tony Laracuente: Okay. Oh, here we go.

Soundia: Just about now, yeah.

Tony Laracuente: Yep. Good. So, so it looks like a good portion of the attendees are the either the administrative officers or the budget analyst’s, great, and that’s good. And we have, well, some of you didn’t respond. But that’s okay. So, it’s tailor made for you guys and so we’ll go from there. Going off the next question. So, this question is all about how do you manage your finances and what software do you use? And what we’re really interested in is how do you manage your projects, your money at the project level and get information to the investigators? So, if you could please respond on which programs, which program you use, you have one to choose from.

Soundia: And I just opened that poll and I’m going to make sure.

[Silence from 3:05 to 3:25]

Soundia: And the system gets another 20 seconds for any last-minute submitters.

Tony Laracuente: All right.

[Silence from 3:31 to 3:47]

Soundia: Should we go ahead and read the results now?

Tony Laracuente: Yes. Thank you. And so, it looks like we’ve got a large majority of you use Excel with a portion of sites using WinRMS. Some are using QuickBooks and then others are, the rest of FMS. So, this is actually important information for us as we start thinking about the future and how we will try to facilitate management of funding for you guys. So, why do this now?

So, this is a longstanding commitment to the enterprise. Over the years, ORD has allowed stations to really manage research projects on their own, their budgets on their own, and so forth. However, one big word has come up in the last two years that has really made us relook at the way things are and the way things work. So, the word rescission, which I think a lot of you have heard about, and the appropriation has really impacted the way we do business. And part of the problem is that in order to effectively manage funding at the local level, we need to understand what the impact is on the overall appropriation. So, we really need a culture change. We need to understand that we have to spend the money now, when you get it, in the year that you get it, and that the really that the two-year appropriation is really not a two-year appropriation. It may be for the purposes of Mr. Dunlow and ORD at the national level, but at the local level we have to think about it as one-year money and how we can move forward.

So, how do we go about this? You know, we need to notify investigators that carryover is no longer acceptable. I’ve been in this since 1990 and, you know, understand the importance of carryover and how it worked and, you know, how we were able to have flexible spending and so forth. However, we really need to start thinking about this as one-year money. You know, when one or, you know, when we have large carryovers and our sites are impacting the national number and we have $70 million dollars in rescission, you know, think of $70 million dollars and take an average of $200,000 dollars a year for our merit review and it gives you a number of how many merit reviews we could have funded with that. So, that’s just kind of a sidebar to kind of give you the impact. We need to work closely with our investigators. We’ve been hearing offhand from investigators that Research Offices aren’t communicating with them about PMO’s. What does it mean to have a PMO? Can you send money back and get it at the tail end of the project? I think what you should try to get out of this today is that the services are interested in understanding what the struggles are and what they can do to reallocate money, maybe at the end of the project, maybe in the following year and so forth. So, you’ll be hearing more about PMO’s. There will be outreaches from services to you meaning that there’ll be outreaches from services to you and then to the PI to try to determine solutions. And this has to be done now because we need to send the money back, if we’re sending money back, before the end of quarter three. And that means, and the reason for that is that ORD needs to be able to reallocate or repurpose those funds this year and also think about the out years and what the impact is because if you’re going to send back $50,000 this year, that $50,000 might come back next year or the following year, and so what will that do to impact their budgets at the ORD level. We need to utilize financial software and tools to manage budgets. And these existing tools are RMS and Excel and so forth but, maybe, we can find better ways or better software’s to help you guys out in the field. I’ve used RMS since 1994 and it’s great. It does have its quirks and those who use it, understand that. But it is a good way to at least manage at the project level the funding. We need to understand the money cycle and who’s responsible for what. I think Mr. Dunlow’s going to talk about that a little bit more. But I think that we need to know what does it mean to have an appropriation this year. What does it mean to start a project in third quarter rather than first quarter or start a project mid-year and so forth. And we need to understand that there’s accountability going on now. The Research Offices are going to be held to a higher standard effective this year. You’re going to be asked to provide more information to ORD to services so they can see where your expenditure rates are and so forth. Not at the national, or at the aggregate level of the medical center because Mr. Dunlow can see that, but it’s actually at the project level. And of course, we need to read the Dunlow notifications, or the Dunlow memo’s, carefully, and we need to really adhere to that. If he’s talking about reimbursables, then you need to really do the reimbursable process the right way. If he’s talking about expense transfers to medical care funding, we need to do that as well because those things are always things that impact your budget. And so, if you get reimbursable money and you don’t expense transfer it, it still impacts the carryovers and the expenditure rates and so forth. If you get reimbursables from the nonprofit into the X2 account, although those are now your funds and those are great to have, it does impact the carryover. So, I believe he said that there’s, you know, a few million dollars out there in the X2 fund that needs to be moved out of the X2 fund. So, pay attention to those things and pay attention to those memos so we can kind of move forward.

So, let’s talk a bit about the money cycle and, you know, what ORD’s going to be holding to Research Offices. They’re going to be holding them accountable for execution. Again, we need to work closely with the investigators and the Center administrative staff to ensure execution. Center’s need to notify Research Office staff when additional funding is requested or offered by ORD Services prior to accepting those funds because while you may be down to 2%, the whole research program may be at 7% or 8% and so it does impact the overall. So, we’re not silos anymore. It’s one overall research program. The Research Office needs to determine how additional funding will impact carryover. And then review your start date to ensure that execution can occur. Don’t accept funding until the investigator’s onboard or has an onboard date. We’ve heard stories where investigators, or projects have not started because the investigator’s still not onboard, but it’s six months later or three months later and that investigator has not been onboarded and so, obviously, that’s going to delay your start date. And again, talk to your service PM, your service program managers. They understand this and they’ll be willing to help you.

So, this additional reporting that’s going to start soon will be going, will happen over the next probably three months, two or three months. RAFT has always been utilized by the field as an informational tool. We’re able to get ITAs, TDAs, pink sheets and so forth. However, this year there’s going to be an additional field that’s going to go from the field back to Central Office which is an accumulative expense field within the fiscal year. So, this will be kind of a lump sum per project over the years as you’re expending. And it’s going to help at least ORD understand where things are with expenditures in the project and so forth and your execution rate. And they can roll that up and look at it in terms of where all your expenditures are compared to what’s showing in SMS. So, the Research Office’s will be the point of contact for these discussions. So, Center’s please make sure you’re talking to the Research Offices about this.

So, I can’t stress enough about, you know, the Dunlow notifications; prior year budget management, current year management, preparing for the end of the year, contracting. Contracting’s a big thing. We all know the delays in contracting, however, the special group that’s assigned to research has done a great job in trying to get contracts through and processed. Interagency agreements, you know, dumping money at the end of the year doesn’t help. So, we need to plan out the interagency agreements a little better. So, these are all critical and will become much more so as we move to IFAMs, excuse me, as we move to IFAMs in the next few years. So, Mr. Dunlow does have an ORD budget mail group. If you’re a budget analyst or AO or technician and want to be added to that group, please email him and, and he’ll add you. And don’t be afraid to ask questions. I think that’s one of the things that, that over the years is that the AO’s in ORD, and the budget analysts in ORD, are very willing to answer questions. It’s better to ask the question. I think the forgiveness issue is no longer there. We just need to be upfront with things and be much more transparent about the way, about the way we do business.

So, today’s and next week’s presentation. Today we’re going to talk about general information regarding the research appropriation and the impact of the research appropriations and other appropriations to research. Next week we’re going to focus on three major areas. Actually, we’re going to really look at two major areas and possibly have a third seminar on reimbursables. We’re going to look at allocations and expenditures. We’re going to talk about tools that you can use to manage and where to get these tools and where to get information. We’ll touch a little bit on WinRMS but we’re looking at a more in-depth training into how to use RMS. I know that the RDCC does WinRMS training but that’s really more how to set it up. This is really going to focus on tricks of the trade and how to use it and how to move forward with it. I’ve been to several sites over the last few years and really have come out with the basics of RMS, but we really need to focus more on how to use it more in depth.

So, I’m going to turn over the presentation to Mr. Dunlow, who’s the Director of Finance for ORD. We all know Allen. We know his messages and so forth. And so, Mr. Dunlow, I’m turning this over to you.

Allen Dunlow: All right. Thanks, Tony. As I go through the next couple of slides, some of you folks have seen some of these slides. They’ve been updated. But some of the basics don’t change as we do our business. So, we’ll kind of want to reiterate some of those, but also want you all to kind of get an understanding of how I see things at this level and then kind of put yourself in the shoes of how and what I’m doing can I support the national level. A few things before I go on. I think we tried to build these slides, you’ll see today and next week, kind of as a reference deck. So, hopefully, you keep these and kind of refer back to them with some questions. And the key, as we move forward, is open communication. So, as Tony said, don’t be afraid to ask questions, don’t be afraid to elevate something. We may not, I may not have the answer but please communicate with us. And the other, I just want to make sure people don’t misunderstand. We’re going to be reviewing and asking you to return money. That doesn’t mean it’s money you’ve lost. It just means that we need to adjust the life cycle or the merit, but we need to get better executing the money we have. So, Tony’s on my next slide already.

My expectations of the field. Above all else in our business, I need honesty with what we’re doing. Bad news, of course, doesn’t get better with age. I’ll try to always be honest with you and I expect the same thing in return. I don’t expect you to be attorney’s, but I’ll go over some basic fiscal law terms that I do expect you to know. You know, this aside, this purpose, time, and amount. You just keep that in the forefront of what you’re doing and, for the most part, you’ll be—you’ll stay out of hot water as far as fiscal law is concerned. You’ll hear this over and over as we go forward. Return money in a timely manner. If you return money to me on September 30th, it doesn’t do me any good. I can’t spend it, so it’ll be carried over either way. So, we’ll be working a lot to try to identify money that can be returned so we can do something with it at this level. And those Dunlow updates that Tony’s called them, I just want you to know that oftentimes I do include your VISN’s CFO’s on those updates for their information, to solicit their support. I don’t really dialogue with your individual CFO’s but I do include the VISN CFO’s so they know what I’m telling you and can hopefully support me in what and managing the research portfolio. I want you never to forget that I don’t forget that you guys have to execute these great plans that we have. It’s relatively easy to sit up here, and when I was in the military, we’d call it the Ivory Tower, but in the Ivory Tower and make these great plans and projections and ideas. But I do realize that you guys are where the rubber meets the road and you have to execute these, and I do understand the challenges. We’ll help you get through those as best that we can, but I do understand what you’re going through.

Our performance measures. At the national level I have to create an operations plan. Oftentimes I have to build that plan before I even know what the final number is. But every month I’m measured against that plan. And I’ll show you that plan in a later slide, how it’s put together. But understand that whenever I deviate from that plan more than 5%, I have to provide a reason of why I’m not on that plan. I build that plan based on historical execution of our portfolio. Again, I don’t know what contracts you have working at any particular time, but I need to project in this plan what contracts we’ll obligate per month throughout the year. So, I use historical numbers to help build that plan, and you’ll see that. As far as carryover, when we build the President’s Budget, one of the things I have to include is an estimated carryover of our money into the second year. And there’s no scientific formula for me to estimate that, it’s just, I guess, more of an art to try to estimate that, but my goal has been, at this level, to establish a carryover of $50 million dollars per year. Of late we’ve fallen significantly off that mark and I’ll talk you through a slide in a few minutes on our goal to get to that $50 million. Again, your metric for carryover is no more than 4%. I look at that, that is total money on station. Not 4% per merit, not 4% per center, it’s 4% of the total money that you have on station and it includes all those different fundings. The other metric that we have to measure, in other words, measured against us, is what’s called prior coverage. That’s basically when you de-obligate a contract or an action the following year and the money is, again, available. We actually have to get permission to re-spend that money so that’s why it’s important that we track that. And it’s important that you try to make the best estimate you can when you initiate a contract or buy a service. And it’s critical that you try to be timely and de-obligating those funds so that hopefully you can use them again that year but then minimize the prior carryover.

And again, you may, as we go through these slides and the training sessions, you may hear some things that are redundant. You know, if I was on a stage, I might be stomping my feet that, you know, this is testable so write this down. We provide money to you on an annual basis with the expectation that that money will be spent that fiscal year. It is a two-year appropriation as we’ve talked about, but we get it every year and we fund your merits and your centers and your facilities on an annual basis with what we think will be spent in those 12 months. Contracts. Again, when I show you the plan, you’ll see how our execution increases in August and September. I encourage you, as best you can, to realign your contracts so they’re not all having to be renegotiated on September or in October. September it’s the end of fiscal year, potential that it won’t happen. October it’s the start of the year. We’re usually under CR, usually have limited funding so it’d be nice, not nice for me but for you, to maybe get your contracts on a March to March or February to February. Something that’s not always coming due at the end of the fiscal year. Interagency agreements. Reimbursables and agreements are a challenge for us. FSC has put out new guidance in the last couple of years. Make sure that your station is following that guidance if you’re involved with interagency agreements. Critical. We have different appropriations of money. You cannot mix the appropriations. Just because you run out of research dollars doesn’t mean you can all of a sudden buy something that’s appropriately funded with the medical service appropriation. Most of you only get research. Some of you get some specific purpose dollars. You can’t mix those. They are sent to you. You must keep them separate. They serve a different purpose and a violation of that, would violate one of those purpose, time, and amount principals. Tony talked about the WinRMS, a great fiscal tool. Those of you who aren’t using it, I encourage you to talk with a station that has used it, see how you might benefit from transitioning to that tool also. Next slide.

These are things you don’t really need to focus on these except we get an appropriation, you can read the Congress.gov. We get an appropriation which gives us our money. OMB there’s some budget authority of what we can spend. You obligate the dollars and then it results in an outlay. Kind of like you write the check, the check’s cashed, and the dollars change hands. That’s the outlay. Commitment accounting is coming in the, in IFAMS. Right now, when I ask you guys you haven’t obligated these dollars so I’m taking them back. I would bet a paycheck that the first answer I get back from all of you is, but I’ve committed it. I have set it aside for this purpose. I don’t see that. When you send an item to contracting and it’s committed for a contract, until it’s awarded and obligated, I don’t really know that. But in the new system I’m told that it will be commitment accounting so at the national level we will have better visibility of what you have in the hopper and what’s working prior to obligation. But again, when people, when Congress and OMB is looking at our execution, they’re really not looking at commitments. They look at this is what you got, and this is the money that’s obligated or cleared the bank and if you haven’t done that, then it might be ripe for taking. Next slide.

These are the basic definitions that I just want you to hone in on. The only thing, you know, you hear me sometimes say PTA; purpose, time, and amount. Congress gives us money for a specific purpose to do research for a specific time, two years, for a specific amount. This year it’s $815 million. We can only buy with those dollars what Congress intended to do which is research. So, you just need to kind of, as far as just remember those three key elements; purpose, time, and amount. You know, we’re about to limit sometimes Congress puts in there additional language in which you can’t exceed don’t really worry about that. Just remember the purpose, time, and amount as far as your fiscal law training. Next slide.

At this level working with OMB. You know, you may know this but at any point in time we, I am working with different years of money. Right now, for example, we are working the FY22/FY23 President’s Budget. Normally that budget would have already been submitted to Congress by the first or second Monday in February. Of course, we’re delayed with that this year, but, so we will be having that submitted to Congress. Our current year is FY21/FY22, so those are the dollars that were passed on 31 December for this year. We have our prior year money, which is our FY20/FY21. So, those dollars are in their second year of their two-year lifecycle. Those dollars that we did not spend last year are what’s in our carryover for this year. Many of you have some medical service appropriation dollars that we send you. We kind of lump those with 870 funds. Those are the QUERI, the proper studies, there’s some genomics, some of you get some Lease Money, one station gets some 00152. Those are our Medical Services Appropriate dollars and those are the one-year dollars. None of these, however, and I’ll point this out later, they do not include the VERA Medical Research Support Dollars. Just for planning purposes, you know, as you know, the one year impacts the next as we defend our budget. Case in point, we carried over $131 million dollars of direct money of FY20/FY21 into FY21/FY22. A logical question is, why do we need to give you so much if you carried over so much money this next year? So, the carryover and our execution does impact our discussions when we’re seeking more money. There’s one key point down there that’s highlighted in yellow and you guys probably know this, you know, one hundred good attaboys are wiped away with one ah, shucks! You know we can be as efficient and work as effectively as we can but one identified waste on the front page of the Washington Post —kind of negates all those great things. So, we’ve got to be careful and be efficient and effective with the dollars that we have. Next slide.

Again, I just wanted to paint you a picture of the dynamics at this level. Sometimes you probably think we’re all schizophrenic because we don’t know what our number is or we’re not planning effectively. For FY21, as an example, the President’s Budget asked for $787 million dollars. During the budget cycle, the number that Congress was talking about was up as high as $840 million. When it finally passed, they settled on $815 million. Out of the blue, which wasn’t on my radar screen, was another rescission of $20 million against our prior year money. Most times when the Congress gives rescissions, they give with one hand and take away the other in the same year. What’s made it kind of challenging for us is they have taken the money back in a prior year when most of that money was already distributed. Case in point, this year, when we’re given the rescission, I only had $1 million dollars here at the national level. All the other money was distributed to you guys. I had to pull back $19 million dollars from you guys out in the field. So, I just want to, and for example for this year, I can’t speak to the number but for FY22 we have asked for a significant increase. Discussion over the last three or four weeks with OMB have hinted that that number for 22 could, could be significantly higher. And then depending on when they pass the appropriation in 22, we could be back in the same boat of lots of money coming in at the last minute that we need to spend to prevent carryover. Next slide.

Some of you guys, I’ve presented this to several different forums and people seem to kind of like this quick snapshot of our world. So, let me just run through these, very good, these elements and how I score them. Last year we only lapsed $3,336 dollars out of $752 million. That’s a good story. You guys can get your CoC letters out and figure out the .0001% of dollars that we actually lapse. I always try to point to that when people say you’re not executing your money. And I kind of say well look at after two years, look what we did. But they don’t really want to hear that. We carried over $158 million dollars when you add everything up. That’s a very bad story. And that ended up costing us $20 million dollars in the rescission. Though nobody will really say that’s why we got the rescission, that’s what, though, we believe. This past year we were under five continuing resolutions. One or two of those were passed for one or two days at a time. That’s difficult for us in getting the ITA money out because we’re left sending out, you know, in some cases $10 dollars or $20 dollars when you break it down, break the merit down with one- or two-day funding. We didn’t get the full amount out until 27th January 2021. Again, with these slides, ITA was just 100% distributed. It’s a poor business when you can’t get your money out until end of the fourth month of the year. It’s difficult for you guys, where the rubber meets the road, and now execute that 12 months of funding with your eight months that you have left. RDIS reporting seemed to go pretty good this year. People have adapted to the new guidance and new process. $20 million rescission caused extensive work. That was difficult. It muddies the water of us going forward as we ask for more money and that makes a very difficult story. At the time this slide was prepared, 100% use of the new reimbursement funds that was a good story. However, last week, somebody out there, and I don’t know who yet, collected $69,000 dollars into the A fund which cannot occur. So, remember do not use the A fund for any of your reimbursable activity. Next slide.

Let me pick it up here a little bit. This is just kind of paint the picture of all the appropriations that are in place. Just see down their medical research, that’s our O161A1. We have O161R1, O161R1 current year. We have the O161X2. That’s the reimbursables from the nonprofit. And we have the O161A5 that’s the five-year money that most of you don’t have to worry about. But all those are that research appropriations. The big circle at the time is all the medical services dollars; the 0160, 0152. That’s where the VERA money, or VERA Research Support, comes from. We don’t manage it. We don’t control it. It’s just used in the formula to get general purpose dollars to your facility. You, as a Research Office, you earned that for the facility, but it goes to the directors who properly manage the entire facility. Also, out of that Medical Services circle that’s where our QUERI money comes from, the Lease Money that a couple of you get and then off to the side you see the IP, which we don’t control, major construction, minor construction we don’t control but those are all appropriations at the VA that support our research effort in some way. So, hopefully that gives you a picture of all the different appropriations in play and you do not mix those appropriations. Next slide.

This is the OP plan that I talk about. This is the FY20 plan and the redline that you see, the dotted line is the plan, the solid redline is the actual execution. And the top line is the FTE count, the plan, and the execution. You'll see an anomaly that happened in February, the big dip in the FTE, and a slight dip in the obligation. Basically, that was one event that happened at FSC where they did not, or they failed to, put the payroll accrual on the books for that period of time. That artificially deflated the February execution numbers which were brought back and OP planned in March. So, if you look at this plan you see we basically did very well sticking to the plan until that fourth quarter. Fourth quarter, even our plan realizes there's a big uptick in execution in September and August, primarily due to contracts. It's a little challenging with the FTE because some of you do your expense transfers at the last minute so payroll actually goes down, contracts actually go up. But this past year we fell off that, the plan, quite a bit in those last two months of the year. Up above you'll see the BOCs, the Budget Optic Codes, that I have to build a plan to. I have to estimate payroll by month, supplies by month, equipment by month to submit that to the department and then report that on a monthly basis. Again, just for your information on how we have to monitor the research execution at this level. Next slide.

I want to just talk about this a little bit. This is our carryover trend. On the right-hand side, you'll see the, the part about lapsed dollars where I think we've done pretty good. I liked to take credit, if you'll notice on the lapsed dollar side, I came to ORD around FY13 and after that you see great improvement of lapsed dollar side as we managed that portfolio. On the dollars carryover, you see that we are making progress to that $50 million target until FY17 and FY18 and then that slope reversed. Some of the things that are impacting on that you'll see what made up that total carryover. You have our next year money. That is the money you get from the nonprofits, for reimbursement for the nonprofit. It is not intended to be a slush fund. You guys need to execute those dollars and get that dollar, those dollars going back down. Find your dollars. We were given a special pot of money in FY18/FY19 of five-year money. Even though it's five-year money, it was held, I’ll use the term against us in the sense that we didn't obligate it the first year or two because it contributed to my carryover. Understand that the rescission, when they hit us for the rescission, they don't take some from the five year and some from the X year, it all came from our direct pot in the middle. So, we need to focus on reducing our carryover in hopes of not having another recession. So, on the five-year dollar, five-year dollars we're trying to get that spent. On the X year, you should be looking at that to see what expense transfers you can make now to lower those, the accounts in your X2 Fund Control Points. And then if you identify money, after you do those expense transfers, maybe you can return that to Central Office, post haste, so that we can reinvest those dollars. So, that's a picture for you that everything counts in our carryover. Next slide.

The bottom line on this, what's the impact of rescission? It’s basically just, it's $70 million over the last three years of lost buying power. The first year I was, when we did the $50 million, I was able to make you whole because I replaced it with current year money. This year when we took back the 20 million, we did not send you current year money to replace what we took back. And some of you that was very painful. Some of you didn't really have much reaction when we had to take back some dollars. Regardless, it's a significant disruption to our operation and trying to provide a stable business environment. So, we really can't afford to lose that much buying power in our portfolio when I have so many unfunded requirements on the table right now. And I really need your help to focus on spending your money to reduce the carryover so hopefully we do not have another rescission. Next slide.

Again, I need you to help me educate the investigators that, though it is by law two-year money, we only send you money one year at a time based on your budget with the expectation that you spend it that year. Don't worry that Dunlow has two-year money and he’s managing that at that level. What we send you is one years’ worth of money and expect it to be spent. That's a challenge for you because when I look at what you have on station, I'm not looking at the individual merits, you know, investigator X hasn't spent any of his money so he still got $100,000 and investigator Y he’s spent his money so he's at $0. I don't see that. I just see that in aggregate you still have $100,000 dollars that is above your 4%. So, work with your investigator's. Educate your investigators to spend their money. If it's not going to be spent, work aggressively to submit project modification orders early so that the program managers can adjust the time period of the merit and we can pull back money and reallocate it at the end of the, of the merit. Next slide.

Just some issues have come up lately on the General Post Fund and we're going to need to try to work to come up with some guidance on it for you guys. I encourage you when you have donations, people who want to donate money to the facility for research, use the nonprofit. Try to steer them away from the General Post Fund. It's a little more workable if you use the nonprofit then the limitation of the General Post Fund. The General Post Fund is not to capture reimbursements. When you get a reimbursement, you've got the 0161R1 or the X2, depending where it's coming from. The General Post Fund is not for your reimbursements. Again, if you don’t know if you have money in the General Post Fund at your station, ask your Fiscal Office. Tony ran a report for me yesterday and amongst all of you there's about $14 million dollars in the General Post Fund that we could be potentially using for our research. Next slide.

I'll now turn the mic over to Kari with her words of wisdom.

Kari Points: Thank you, Allen. So, I'm going to talk to you more specifically about the Research Office and the roles and responsibilities when running a research program in terms of the budget. As Tony mentioned, it's the Research Office that has the ultimate responsibility for the overall budget at your facility. They need to have an understanding of all the programs in ORD; biomedical, clinical, rehab, your HSR&D, and how to manage the funds within each of those programs. And it's really important to establish those lines of communication with your program officers, your service directors and being transparent about the different service lines on how you're doing in your expenditures for the year. As we’ve discussed, if you have an investigator that is not spending their funds, it looks like they're going to have a huge carryover, you know, tackle that early. Reach out to the program officer, the service line, and see about doing a PMO and having those reallocated. If you have a center, or multiple centers, you need to be working with those administrators to ensure that they are on target for spending for the year. That they are not going to impact your carryover in a negative way and that their spending, like I said, is on track. Your budget analyst in your Research Office is a critical asset for you and they can provide you updates on how you're doing in your fund control points, how your overall program is looking. And then, you know, if there's an investigator that's overspending, underspending working with them to get that back on track. Allen talked a lot about the problems of operating under the continuing resolution. Us in the field know how great it is when you get those pieces of funding and wait four months to get all the funding obligation and the complications that arise to process those and ensure that you're spending within your operational budget during the continuing resolution. If you have special purpose funds in the 0160, your medical center appropriation, and you have personnel that are crossing the programs or maybe working on a research program then they're working on a medical care appropriated project, making sure that you are properly expensing those accounts and doing the cost transfers throughout the year and understanding how, when you do those cost transfers and you're working on different appropriations, how it's going to impact your research appropriated funds. And so that’s kind of where it gets complicated where you have personnel that are spread across different programs or even different appropriations and managing that piece. Next slide, please.

Yeah CC 101 funds. So, majority of your research appropriated funds come at the project merit level, but your CC 101 funds are those funds that are given to really manage your support of the research dollars. So, they could be used for salary, equipment, education, travel, or any other type of like broad research support that's not specific to a research project. The CC 101 funds are distributed based on the amount of VA funded research at your specific VA. They determine your CC 101 funds. I'll show the calculation on the next slide, but it's based on your last three years of executed obligation. So, that's another example why spending your funds is really important. So, looking at your obligations for the past three years to determine the amount of support you're going to get in your CC 101. In FY20 they changed the formula to add in a baseline of $150,000 for the CC 101 support. And that was done to better support your small and medium sized programs.

And here's the calculation. So, as you can see, and I can go through these in detail, but the more research funding that you received, VA appropriated research funds, the more CC 101 funds that you will receive.

The RDIS report. So, the RDIS report you'll hear a lot about as you get closer to the end of a fiscal year. That information is pulled from ePROMISE. And ePROMISE manages all your VA funded, non-VA funded, and non-funded research projects that are approved by your Research and Development committee. So, basically any project that your R&D committee approved, it needs to be entered into ePROMISE. For best practice you should not wait until the end of the fiscal year and do that mad rush to make sure all your projects are in the system. You should be doing that throughout, throughout the year. Best practice for us is you have the R&D committees, the minutes are written up, take those minutes and get it into ePROMISE on a monthly basis. And so, by doing that, at the end of the year, when you go to your RDIS annual report you'll be entering in the confirmed allocations for all of your VA funded projects, and either the expenditures or the allocation using the noticeable work for all your non-VA funded projects. Next slide, please.

And the reason why it's important to enter these allocations and expenditures in the RDIS accurately is that, it is used to determine what your VERA funds are going to be for your medical center. And the VERA dollars are allocated annually to the medical center. As Allen said, its 0160 funds, not research funds that they receive and it’s to be used for their operation support. To determine each VA share, there’s a formula that’s done based on your allocations and expenditures you provide in the RDIS report. And then each year, based on the budget allowed, it’s determined what your VA share will be.

Deadlines. We’ve talked about those Dunlow notices. They are very important throughout the year. We also need to look at those for the deadlines. Deadlines may also come from your fiscal or contracting office and you need to be paying attention to those and communicating those to the individuals that it impacts. For example, if your credit card transactions are going to be shut down towards the end of the year as reconciliations are taking place, and your VistA menus are shut down by Cisco, you need to be letting your PI’s know that, your lab personnel, the people that are sending funds so that they can plan ahead. Same thing with your 1358, 2237 transactions. When does your Fiscal Office start closing down those options for the end of the year so that you can get those in on time. Contract deadlines. You need to pay attention to the [unintelligible term 52:40] tables. Make sure that you’re getting your equipment and your service requests in on time and making sure that your PI’s also know those deadlines. So, they’re not coming to you with an equipment order in July and finding out it’s too late to get that order through contracting. Reimbursements. You’ll hear from Allen at the end of a fiscal year that, you know, you don’t want to pull in funds at that time in September where it will just get lost if you try to do a collection. Prior year. Every year it’s March 31st is the deadline and that, you know, I think we need to do a better job at the field is paying attention to that March 31st getting our prior year dollars cleared out and focusing on sending our current year funds at that point. And then cost transfers and IAA’s there’s deadlines for those as well. And I’ll talk a little bit more about cost transfers later on.

Right here. So, cost transfers, as we’ve talked about, it’s important to do cost transfers throughout the fiscal year. There are some facilities that have gotten into the habit of doing them all at the end of the year in September. In talking to some sites, it sounds like, you know, their fiscal audit team encourages that way, but we really need to move away from doing cost transfers in one lump group in September. These should be done throughout the fiscal year. And one of those reasons is that chart that Allen showed that he’s, you know, trying to plan his execution. It’s really hard to do projections throughout the year if all of a sudden in September there’s a huge change in your salary costs and you just executed a whole bunch of cost transfers. As they mentioned, prior years need to be expended by March 31st. You shouldn’t wait to the end of the year to close out your prior year funds. Again, those cost transfers should be occurring—now, right now you should be working on those. Cost transfers may not just be between prior year and current year funds. They may be between, if you have a special purpose project, you may be transferring them between the medical center and the research appropriations. You may be transferring them with the reimbursables, your R1X2 funds to clear those out, 870 funds. Or you may have people that work on both with the clinical project and the HSR&D project, so you need to transfer them off the program to make sure those costs are allocated appropriately. And again, these all should be completed throughout the year.

Your Fiscal Office. Your Fiscal Office is going to be a very, very important resource for you and communication with them is key. You need to be working to establish a relationship with them. Whether it be monthly meetings or routine communication. Because they’re going to be your resource for so many tasks that you have to do. You know, they’re the ones that are going to be obligating your transactions, providing you with a status of allowance. Helping you, you know, if I have a fund control point off one morning and I can’t figure it out and I’ve looked at the status allowance, I’ve looked at my daily report, the running balance. An email to Fiscal and I usually find out, you know, what’s going on if they can help me with that. They’ll process your TDA’s for you and the appropriate fund control points. They’ll move your ceilings. If you need more money in salaries than all other, they can make those moves. They’re going to do your cost transfer request and your billing request. So, it’s really important that they know what’s going on and that you’re meeting with them and communicating with them on your needs. Research is always a little bit of a unique, so it definitely takes that working together to get those things done. Next slide.

The other office is your nonprofit. If you have a nonprofit, again, it’s important to establish a relationship with them and lines of communication as you’re going to work together on a lot of requirements through the year. Whether or not it’s your, you know, an IAA or when you’re working on the RDIS report, you’re going to need their expenditure information. You may have MOU’s, IPA’s, and then you may be billing the nonprofit if you’re providing services for them that you need to be reimbursed for. And I’ll talk a little bit more about billing on this next slide.

So, your nonprofit corporations and universities. Those with collections need to occur when you’re providing these services with a research appropriated dollars and you need to be reimbursed for those costs. So, one example would be animal per diem. If you’re housing their animals, you need to be reimbursed for those costs of the animals. Salaried costs. If you have an individual at the VA, salaried employee, and working for them on a project you need to be billing for their salary. And core services is another example. If they’re using a piece of our equipment that has fees associated with it. To initiate the bill of collection, you need to have the billing menu in ViSTA. They need to be vendorized [sic]. And you really need to pay attention to how you’re entering the bill. If it’s the nonprofit, you’re going to bill the 0161X2 funds and the university bill will go to the R1 fund. And it’s really important to make sure that you’re billing the correct fund when you initiate those. And as Allen talked about, the X2 funds do not expire but they do count toward your carryover. There’s a reason why you got those X2 funds. There is a cost that was incurred by your research appropriated dollars and you got reimbursed for it, you need to finish that transaction. You need to do that cost transfer and get those funds back to that fund control point for those costs that were incurred. You should not be letting those funds build up. They need to be put back into the research appropriated.

Communication with PI’s. So, PI’s, you know, we’ve heard from different PI’s that they’re not getting their financial information and we really need to make sure that that changes. The key to them ensuring that their projects are expended appropriately, now that we’re really focusing on these dollars, these one-year dollars, within the fiscal year. So, my advice, the best practices, would be to meet with each PI at the beginning of a fiscal year, go over their funds allocations, look at their pink sheet, what are they going get this year and develop a spend plan right then. You know, look at how we’re going to spend your funds throughout the fiscal year. They should be receiving monthly account statements from you. And that information, when you send out those statements, talk to them about how they’re doing. Are they on target for the year to spend all their funds? Does it look like they’re overspending, underspending, are there adjustments that need to be made to their spending habits to correct that? I mean you should be continually reviewing each PI account throughout the year. Right now, look at your account statements. Is there a PI that has a large amount of funds available? Well let’s reach out to them. Maybe there’s a reason for that and we need to contact ORD and do a PMO and have those funds reallocated. And like I mentioned earlier with the deadlines, ensure they know those deadlines. Let them know, hey, equipment orders are due this date. If you’re going to do a service contract, we need to know by then. Credit card spending is going to be cut off for the end of year on this date and just really stress to the PI’s that the VA does not allow for carryover. Especially if you have a new investigator, they may not be used to that. They might be used to, you know, non-VA funds, bigger carryovers. It’s really important to make sure that they know that up front at the beginning of their funding period that, hey, the VA doesn’t allow carryover, you need to spend all your funds this year. And just really hold them accountable for spending.

We talked about returning funds to ORD. You need to work with your investigator and program officers to submit those PMO’s if it looks like they’re not going to execute the funding. And it’s smart to get ahead of that early so that you’re not going to end up with a large carryover amount. And we’re really going to start looking at this closer by already is in quarter three this year. But you know, prior to returning funds to ORD really make sure, though, that all expenditures have been received for that project. You know, are there going to be any outstanding charges? And if you’re returning funds because investigators retire and are leaving the VA, just always factor in that there’s going to be that annual leave payout before you return the funds. Next slide.

Okay. Some tools of the trade. I’ll talk about WinRMS on the next slide. The rest of these we’re going to go through in detail in the next session next week. But the VSSC, the Fiscal Report, that’s a great tool to find your status of allowance which you can also obtain from the Fiscal Office. You can use that to balance your Fund Control Points to FMS and make sure that you have all your expenditures in line. Your F20 Daily Activity Reports I use that all the time. If for some reason I’m out of balance in the morning and I was on balance yesterday, I’ll pull up the Daily Activity Report. What hit those Fund Control Points overnight? You know, what adjustments do I need to make? The Open Obligation Report is really important to stay on top of. As Allen talked about going back prior years, if you have those open obligations, you want to make sure that if you’re going to be de-obligating funds or not using them, that you tackle that before those funds expire and they’re not lost to your facility. So, if you have prior year dollar obligations right now you should be looking at those, making sure that you’re going to be invoiced for the full amount. If you’re going to de-obligate, plan ahead for that so you can spend the funds before they expire. The AACS reports, where you’re going to find your TDA’s and VERA information, this you can use for a lot. And they’ll have your running balance and expenditures and it’s really important to make sure that you have the appropriate menus and keys that you need, and you can talk to your Fiscal Office about what you need to get access. And then the RAFT report where you can find your investigator pink sheets and your funding reports for the year.

And then my favorite program, I get really, really excited talking about WinRMS. I know the majority of you, based on the poll, do not have this program and I really highly encourage you using it. I use it every day. It’s a lifesaver. What it does is it interfaces with VistA and downloads in all your accounting information that has occurred since your last download. So, it’s going to download your salary information to personnel, your contracts, your credit card purchases, your cost transfers. All your transactions download into the program. And the great thing about it is you can set up subcontrol points in VistA and they can actually download into an investigator’s account. So, at any point, on any day, an investigator can email you, ask you for account statement, and within a few clicks of a button you can give them a detailed PDF that tells them exactly where they’re at. It also projects out the salary costs for the employees for the year so you can plan ahead on what that’s going to cost you. It helps you to identify accounting errors in your research project budget. So, if an employee is not paid correctly or there’s a charge that’s not correct, WinRMS is going to help you identify that and then you can work with your Fiscal Office to correct those transactions. It is incredibly cumbersome to set up. I will admit, you know, it’s challenging to get it going but once you do, it is a huge asset to your accounting staff. I have multiple members in my research office that use it. And they can run expense reports, like I said, you can provide reports to your investigator at a moment’s notice and let them know where it’s at. So, if you don’t have WinRMS, or you have it and you’re not using it and you want to learn more about it, reach out to Tony and we would be happy to help you install it at your facility. And then I’ll send it back to Tony for the summary.

Tony Laracuente: Sometimes you’ve got to figure out how to unmute the microphone. So, thanks Allen, and thanks Kari. I can’t say enough about WinRMS. It is, as Kari said, cumbersome to start, to start up but once you get going, just like anything else, if you take care of it daily, it really becomes part of the routine and it really does help you out. So, I want to summarize because I think that, you know, we provided you some tools. Next week we’re really going to get into those tools and how to access those tools and utilize them to better manage your budget. I can’t say enough about communication, not just with the Centers and PIs but with ORD. Times have changed. This is a new year, it’s a new challenge, and we really need to step up and help Dr. Ramoni and Mr. Dunlow in managing the budgets appropriately and really spending down so we can work through. You need to build relationships with Budget and Accounting. We do know that there are some facilities that have had some problems there. But I think that the CFO’s of the facilities are responsible for the budgets and for accounting, just like you are. ORD will hold you responsible, VHA finance will hold the fiscal officers responsible. So, it’s got to be a team effort to make this work. You’ve got to stay on top of the budget. It can easily get away from you. We’ve seen it. We’ve seen it happen where, you know, all of a sudden the fiscal year is over and you have a lot of money or you don’t have enough money or, you know, it’s two years later and an investigator comes and says, do you know what happened to my $50,000 dollars from two years ago? It’s really critical that we get there. Ask questions. Ask questions. Ask questions. Mr. Dunlow’s there. We’re there. We’re going to, we’re going to work on setting up kind of a help desk for budget issues. We’re going to take budget analysis and AO’s from across the nation, we’re going to ask them to help, you know, respond to questions and so forth. That will be coming up in the next six months. So, hopefully we can get that established for next fiscal year. Now I will tell you that Kari and I specifically understand that there are issues with hiring people. There are issues with bringing people on board. We know that. But it’s also incumbent on you to figure out when there is a problem that, you know, you just can’t hold onto the money. You’ve got to work with the services and the program offices to send that money back, to do PMO’s, to say, listen I can’t hire this person, you know, to start this project for six months. We’re going to have to kind of rework the budget and so really work with them and communicate.

So, I think we’re going to stop now. And I’m going to open it up. We really want to answer questions now. If we don’t get to questions, we’re going to answer them, you know, if you put them out on a chat box and we run out of time, we’ll still answer them. So, we’ll get to the point where we write you though, so. So, I’m going to send this back to Kate and go from there.

Kate: Okay great. I’m just going to take one moment to share my screen.

Tony Laracuente: Do I need to stop sharing? No, okay.

Kate: Oh no. I have it.

Tony Laracuente: Okay.

Kate: All right.

Allen Dunlow: It looks like some of the questions are coming in in the chat box also.

Tony Laracuente: Yeah.

Kate: All right. So, here’s our first question. Can everyone see that?

Allen Dunlow: Ah yeah. I typed a response into, to that answer and just so you know, that a couple years ago OMB apportioned most of the money from the government on a quarterly basis. Kind of like you get your two-week paycheck, but you can’t spend it until you get that two-week paycheck. A couple years ago we were able to change our category of how we get our money. I think it’s called category B which meant that OMB basically gave us our full year apportionment upfront. That worked great the first year it happened because we were able to send out the ITA 100% funded. However, when there’s a CR, it kind of negates that benefit because we’re only given so much money at a time. So, that is we have tried to address that and make all attempts to get out as much money out early as possible. The other thing going forward that we are probably going to look at with OMB is maybe even getting the research appropriation considered or get it an advanced appropriation. The rest of the VHA has an advanced appropriation. For example, the medical services they already know their number for FY22 because they have an advanced appropriation. If we could get research into that same scenario, we would know our number for FY22 already and it would help us with our distribution, getting the money out early, and maybe address some of the challenges we have of late dollars going out.

Tony Laracuente: So, I think I’m going to take the next question which is the field can provide plenty of feedback in the proper form. Yes. No question about it. I think there’s been many forms over the last two or three years that have brought up issues and struggles. I think contracting was one. I think IT was another one. And HR has been the constant. I think the point to take home here is that we all understand that HR is a struggle. Some VISN’s are doing a much better job of transitioning to the new, the new VHA mandates that the VISN VVHR points and so forth. Some VISN’s are struggling with it. And it has taken, for example, in my VISN a year for us to understand this and to really work through. However, I do see the light at the end of that tunnel. However, I think what we’re trying to tell you is, if you’re having these struggles, you’ve got to talk to the program officers and you’ve got to, you’ve got to sit down and reallocate your funding. Because it does nobody any good for you to carry that money over when you’re not going to be able to use it. And then we can, you can work with the program officers to submit a PMO which is, by the way, a Project Modification form that was built a few years back to really work through project changes, administrative changes, PI changes, redistribution of funds. And I think that ORD service, the ORD services are talking as well about, you know, how to send the money out. Do you need the whole project one-year budget right away? Do you want to look at it and maybe reallocate and so forth. So, from the ORD perspective I think they’re looking at things. From the Research Office perspective, we’ve just got to, we’ve got to understand that these are problems and there are major obstacles and what we don’t want to do is have a PI lose out on the money so let’s redistribute it after we hire, knowing when we hire somebody.

Allen Dunlow: Let me just kind of add to answer kind of another concern that was in the chat box. It is not the intent of ORD, or Dr. Ramoni, to take money from an investigator and reduce his overall merit. On those PMO’s the intent, hopefully, would be to add six months or whatever at the end of the merit with funding because it got a late start or didn’t execute or hire somebody the first six months. And that’s going to be an education process to convince investigators that they’re not going to lose their money, that it’s going to be added to the end of their merit if those situations occur.

Tony Laracuente: Yeah. And I think that, that the nice part is that the PMO’s a formal document that’s signed off by everybody. And so if you have a budget redistribution and it’s in that, there’s a spreadsheet in there, and that’s signed off by the PI, the ACOS, and the service director at the ORD level, then you’re, you know, I’d never say the word guaranteed, but at least there’s a document that you can fall back on to tell your investigators, look, we’re sending money back where you’re going to get it in FY25 or FY24 or whatever, that kind of thing. So, I think that PMO process does work very well and it does document because, once they do the PMO, they update your pink sheet in RAFT and so that’s, you know, the piece that helps out. You’re doing another question?

Kate: Oh yes. We have a lot of questions.

Tony Laracuente: Yeah. I think we answered that one. What do you think, Allen?

Allen Dunlow: Yeah. I’ll just add to that that Dr. Ramoni is doing everything she can to address the HR issue. As a matter of fact, she has a meeting tomorrow afternoon with the head of workforce management to see if there is some type of research cell that could be stood up. So, all I can say is the HR issue is understood and Dr. Ramoni is doing what she can to address that.

Tony Laracuente: Yeah. I do think that one, one additional point here is that the VISN’s should be communicating with the medical center’s on their process changes. And I think that once that started happening in VISN 7 it was understood of what the processes were going to be. It doesn’t mean that the processes are perfect but, you know, to understand that classification, CCU, and what the, you know, timelines are because they are held to certain accountable standards of classifying PD’s as well as what the position managers do and so forth. So, I think we’re going to work towards doing some education on that piece as well. But again, it’s working with your PI and if you’re having trouble with hiring and so forth, then it’s kind of rethinking the PMO through the process. Okay. Next one, Kate.

Yeah again, I think the PMO is really the document that will change things. And once you get that PMO approved, then the pink sheet changes. And then the pink sheet changes there’s your, kind of your contract in my mind. Another one, Kate.

So, COVID, yes, so this a very big issue. And I think that we have talked about PMOs, we have talked about submitting PMOs. I think there’s guidance on the ORD website about COVID-19 and the COVID-19 facts that talks about what to do in that, in those situations. So, absolutely, you know, the PMOs are a big fan. I know the staff were paid during this. There is the issue of staff that are being, that are being pulled. Those should be reimbursed but through, through fiscal back through the research appropriation which then impacts your carryover, by the way. And so, you have to take those things into consideration. There are fiscal guidelines on people that were pulled from research into medical care to support COVID activities.

Allen Dunlow: Yeah. This kind of falls in line with everything we’ve been talking about. If this occurred, there needs to be the PMO put in because the project was delayed. The money returned to ORD, or the services entirely matters so that we can reallocate it this year. I mean all these actions that we’re talking about don’t work in isolation. They all, you know, you push here and something else pops out. So, you know, it’s acknowledging that there was a delay, acknowledging that there needs to be an adjustment to the merit or whatever. Acknowledgement that there’s money that probably would not be spent and then returning it in a timely manner.

Tony Laracuente: Next one, Kate. So, we’ll talk about that next week, about the training on VSSC. Is there any research projects that would not be able to send back funds? Yes. My understanding is that—you can always send back funds, it’s getting an extension or a redistribution. And I think that if you talk to the services directly, and if you have a REAP or a Center or a COIN definitely talk to the cen—the service direct—the service program managers about that. Next one. Allen, you want to tackle that one?

Kari Points: Hey.

Allen Dunlow: Go ahead.

Tony Laracuente: Okay.

Kari Points: Oh, I was going to say, can you read—there’s a question about—so there are people on the phone, can you read the question?

Tony Laracuente: Oh yes. Is there a plan to change RAFT to provide more usual information for budget, specifically a TDA categorization, AO salary and travel, all over salary and travel?

Allen Dunlow: I assume that means to provide useful information. I don’t know if that what usual information.

Tony Laracuente: Yeah, yeah, yeah, yes, yeah, yep.

Allen Dunlow: There’s no change that I’m working on to change the presentation. I was thinking most of that salary breakdown, travel breakdown, all other breakdown is on the pink sheet, budgets.

Tony Laracuente: Correct.

Allen Dunlow: So, I’m not—I would need to ask that you, or you guys send us what it’s not showing that you think would be more hopefully so that we can potentially look at it.

Tony Laracuente: I think what they’re saying is on the statement in the, on the comments of the TDA, you know, sometimes you say salary for PI or, you know, for all other funds. I will tell you that, that you have a lot of discretion at the facility level to move money into all other salary or travel, so.

Allen Dunlow: We actually, and I hope that we didn’t make it harder, we went the other way actually.

Tony Laracuente: Right.

Allen Dunlow: This year or the year before, we don’t have a separate travel pneumonic anymore. We’ve sent it all under one pneumonic and you can put it in however you have your fund control points set up based on the pink sheets. And the total number that we sent out, hopefully, should balance to what’s on the pink sheet.

Tony Laracuente: Right. Next one. We know. Yes, HR. We understand. Next one. It shows what you owe, so the question is, when RMS, it says, when RMS show updated amounts available in 1358s and 2237s as transactions within them are posted, do you need to be able to view salary on CPs to have research salaries update RMS? So, that’s a great question and basically when RMS downloads to current obligated amounts. So, if you have a purchase card and it changes, then it updates that purchase card amount. It does update to 1358. It does not tell you the amount available. You have to go into VistA for that. And then it does, you do not need to view the salaries of CPs, but you need to be able to have access to them to download them because the salary SCPs are not, not really viewable per se. So, the salaries update because then they tie into paid. Kari, am I right in that?

Kari Points: Yes. Sorry.

Tony Laracuente: That’s fine.

Kari Points: Video thing got away from me. I was answering another question’s box [unintelligible 1:23:00]

Tony Laracuente: Okay. Kari, or Kate, you want to, next one. We also have issues with contractings or whether we can show you in FORCE etc., that you have, that we have done. Actually, Allen, you want to address that one?

Allen Dunlow: Actually, when you guys use the Research Contracting Office, they have set up a SharePoint site for me that I have visibility of all the contracts that they are working on for you guys. If you do not use the Research Contracting Office, I don’t see that, I won’t see that. So, to some extent, you know, I, if you use them, I do see that, what is working so I can get an idea of what you might have committed. But it still boils down to, you know the obligations at the end of the day. But that is one source where I do see what contracts you might be working if you use their office.

Tony Laracuente: Kate, next question. We’re going to provide some kind of—so the question is, how do we move funds from GPS to NPC if the funds are so old that we no longer have what they were originally donated for on record? Great question. We are going, we’re working on some guidance on this. So, a lot of, a lot of this happened in the 1990s and so we’re trying to pull that guidance out and we’ll hopefully get you an SOP in the near future.

The hiring issues, extended classification unit is that experienced by others, the position of administering a multi-million-dollar project was plus fund at entry level. Yes. So, Dr. Cody has a workgroup that’s looking at standardizing positions such as project manager, data manager, data analyst, research coordinator, and so forth. So, once those positions are, are classified at the national level then my understanding is that these positions will then have to be accepted by the local DEU, or the local classification units. And so, hopefully, this will be the entry way to addressing the general problem of under classification or so forth. There is an AO who has extensive experience in classification and has actually taught us that it’s all in the wording. And it’s all in how you put the duties and the tasks together and explain them and so we’re taking that knowledge forward to work with this group. So, hopefully that will start addressing some of these inconsistencies of positions across the nation.

So, the question is, can you breakdown what to do with reimbursables for fiscal for dummies? Allen, do you want to take care of that one or you want me to?

Allen Dunlow: I will try to then you can correct me. Reimbursables are other’s people money. You get direct money that’s the money that I send you that’s VA appropriated. Reimbursables are money from NIH, DoD, if it’s a nonprofit when you bill them. It’s any other money that’s not direct. When you get the reimbursable dollars it’s usually to reimburse you for an expense that you incurred on the direct side. So, when that happens, you get the reimbursable, and then you do the expense transfer against those reimbursed dollars to spend them which then kind of replenishes your direct side from control point for that reimbursement.

Tony Laracuente: Right. I think that, I think that the key issue is that you’ve got to move the money out of the R1 and, and the X2 back into the A1 appropriations through the expense transfer. Or expense transfer from A1 to the R1 it connects to. And if you stay on top of that, then you don’t build up those numbers. Kate, do we have one more?

Kate: All right. And then this is our last question that we have time for.

Tony Laracuente: Yeah. So, thank you. So, so this was a request. So, be judicious about your PMOs. I think that you really need to plan this out. This is the biggest year, the end of this year. And I think you need to plan this out as you sit down with your investigators and say, okay, we need this so let’s plan out for the following three years for the existing projects and so forth. It’s not going to be helpful that we’re, you know, constantly taking project X to project 1 and sending a PMO every year. That’s just not going to help matters. So, sit down, be judicious, plan, and work with the, with the program officer. Make sure they’re aware of why you’re doing this and so forth. So, yeah, please be judicious about this and work and communicate with the program officer. So, you know, I really want to thank everybody. I hope this was helpful. I think this is the beginning of more communication about budget matters. I, I think that we’re going to take some of the questions and some of the feedback and apply to next week’s session. Again, next week is on allocations and expenditures and, and what to do with those. And, and it’s going to be pretty detailed so we’ll have two slide sets for next week and we can go from there. Allen, do you want any final comments up on your end?

Allen Dunlow: No. I just want to kind of sum it up, you know, we realize that half our challenge is educating all of you on what’s going on or what to do. There’s turnover out in the field and when we can’t have like face-to-face sessions and training sessions, part of our problem is the training. So, this is a step forward in hoping to have some training like this and maybe even in the future, we can formalize these to some type of more of a quarterly type basis that can focus in on a specific topic of the day or of the time. But again, I encourage you to communicate, communicate, and ask questions. And I apologize, someone said about using acronyms. We should have thought about that with a training session for new people not to use so many acronyms. But I’m willing to talk to any of you one-on-one if we need to, to further facilitate the dialogue. But thanks for your participation.

[ END OF AUDIO ]