

How Texas Tech Maximizes Non-STEM Research Success with InfoReady

An InfoReady Case Study



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For many of us in the institutional research community, the word "research" itself is synonymous with STEM fields -- so much so that we may not think much about research activity in other areas of the academy. That's regrettable, because an extraordinary volume of quality research and creative production is regularly manifest in the humanities, social sciences, and creative and performing arts. And just as in science, technology, engineering, and math, non-STEM faculty require internal and external funding for their research endeavors. That means funding competitions, which in turn means a significant role for InfoReady.

Such was certainly the case at Texas Tech University six years ago when Dustin Delano, then an administrator in the University's Office of Research and Innovation, began exploring creative and innovative ways of utilizing the InfoReady platform beyond funding competitions and limited submissions. Examples included registrations and nominations, in staff senate voting procedures, for atypical grant funding, participant recruitment, and even RSVPs with unique requirements.

In non-STEM applications, InfoReady proved its value, and that remains the case today as Abigail Swingen, Ph.D., Associate Vice President for Research, and Moriah Gonzales, Lead Administrator, both in TTU's Office of Research and Innovation, continue to rely on InfoReady's automated processes. Using InfoReady, they maximize and expand their institution's research productivity in the humanities, social sciences, and creative and performing arts fields.

A particularly notable example of InfoReady's utilization is TTU's Scholarship Catalyst Program.

Sponsored by the Offices of the President, Provost, and Research & Innovation, the program's goals are to promote the research and creative endeavors of faculty in the arts, humanities and social sciences.

The average grant is \$3,500. However, they're nonetheless significant in that non-STEM faculty generally don't need to support the large equipment, overhead, and staffing expenses of sophisticated labs, conduct clinical trials, or purchase 6- and 7-figure instruments and scanners. What they do need, according to Dr. Swingen, is precisely the kind of financial support the Scholarship Catalyst Program offers, including funds for

small equipment purchases, student salaries, supply purchases, and travel for interviews, data collection, and other research needs.

Research administrators who work with STEM investigators will recognize how similar the Texas Tech humanities, social sciences, and creative and performing arts award competition process is to theirs. For example, in a typically 4-month time frame -- August competition announcement to November award decision -- Dr. Swingen and Moriah will see anywhere from 36 to 61 applications completed via InfoReady and made accessible for vetting with regard to accuracy and format. The applications are then forwarded to faculty reviewers, again through InfoReady, evaluated and rated, and award decisions are made.

To ensure the fairest possible process, Dr. Swingen empanels three different review committees. There is one each for the humanities, social sciences, and creative and performing arts. Past winners, TTU faculty, and other stakeholders comprise their membership. Award determination is based on the overall quality of the proposal, realistic time frame for the project, and the likelihood that the project will lead to clear outcomes, such as publications, presentations, or proposal submissions.

The administrative tasks would have been hugely challenging for administrators like Moriah Gonzales without InfoReady's automated processes.

"I save a lot of time with InfoReady," Moriah says. "Obviously, we still have work to do, but InfoReady eliminates not only time but error. Every morning I check InfoReady and all the information I need is right there in one spot. It makes my job so much easier, plus we can access necessary data right away without bombarding people with emails. Simply put, InfoReady takes a lot of work out of the process."

And for busy faculty asked to devote significant time and effort to proposal review and evaluation, that burden is significantly eased, streamlined, and error-proofed through InfoReady. But how do administrators encourage faculty members to utilize an automated platform like InfoReady?

According to Moriah Gonzales, "I try to smooth the adoption process by introducing myself to faculty who didn't already know me, made new connections, and our office offered one-on-one training to take faculty through InfoReady. While some of our reviewers are department chairs who are mostly familiar with InfoReady, for others it was an investment of our time that really proved worthwhile. We also hold open houses for InfoReady training -- currently virtual open houses because of COVID."

Moriah also notes an especially innovative strategy employed by her office to encourage compliance: "We even make a point of showing faculty what happens to their

applications after it leaves their computers so they can see and understand just how InfoReady makes the process better for everyone involved. The bottom line is that we want to make certain our faculty are comfortable using InfoReady, and let them know we're here and always available to offer training and support."

There's no question that, by definition, proposal review remains a burden for faculty. However, Dr. Swingen thoughtfully acknowledges each reviewer's commitment by sending him or her a personal note of appreciation. A copy is also sent to the relevant department chair for placement in the reviewer's personal file.

That's perhaps a small touch, but a gesture that clearly underscores how vitally important the review process is to a powerfully functioning research institution. And for Texas Tech, the proof lies in the Scholarship Catalyst Program's successes, which include a number of external proposals to federal agencies, the publication of scholarly books and journal articles, art residencies and installations, and conference presentations.

Results such as these are not only testament to the work of TTU's Office of Research & Innovation, but to the participating faculty in the University's Humanities, Social Sciences, and Creative & Performing Arts Colleges. And as Dr. Abigail Swingen and Moriah Gonzales acknowledge what InfoReady brings to Texas Tech's research competitions -- a Cloud-based, accessible-from- anywhere platform. This is particularly critical in a COVID quarantining and restricted campus environment. And, not least, it is a solution easy to learn and use for administrators, investigators, and reviewers.

An added InfoReady benefit comes via a final shout-out from Moriah, who "loves InfoReady's customer service and willingness to customize and improve features to make things better and easier -- especially to the benefit of reviewers so they actually *want* to review!

To learn more about InfoReady, schedule a demo, or get in touch with current InfoReady platform users, contact Amanda or Max at the contact info below.

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