

OVERVIEW OF ATHABASCA UNIVERSITY'S INDIRECT COSTS PROGRAM (ICP)* EXPENDITURES IN FISCAL YEAR 2013-2014

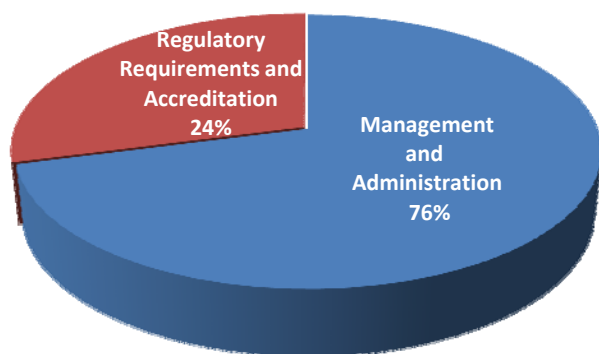
One of the key research-related goals set out in the Athabasca University Strategic University Plan 2011-2016 is to provide appropriate support for faculty, staff and student research and scholarship. The Indirect Costs Program (ICP) funding has played a significant role in enhancing the research services provided to AU faculty and students.

Being able to offer a broad range of research-related services available is an important asset in recruiting highly qualified research chairs, faculty and trainees (e.g., graduate students; postdoctoral fellows). Likewise, helping them establish a sound program of funded research is essential to their success and their retention within the institution. The contribution of the ICP program to these endeavors is invaluable in increasing AU's research capacity.

Indirect Costs of Research include central and departmental expenses such as lighting, heating, training, and/or general administrative costs that the university incurs to support research, which are not directly attributable to a specific research project. The type of costs varies among institutions; however the common theme is they are essential to the successful completion and management of that research project.

The federally funded Indirect Costs Program (ICP) allows Athabasca University (AU) to defray some of the ongoing costs of research by lessening the financial burden of operating expenses associated with the coordination/administrative costs required to support AU's research enterprise. This in turn, helps our Researchers focus on conducting research and advancing knowledge.

During the past fiscal year, AU's ICP funds were earmarked to defray expenditures in two ICP categories: (1) management and administration and (2) regulatory requirements, both of which are priority areas for AU's Research enterprise.



Impact of the Indirect Costs Program Funding

Management and Administration. The single most important new initiative funded by the ICP in this category during the past was the implementation of an integrated, online database-driven system, known internally as the *AU Research Portal*. This system will streamline the process for submitting, reviewing, approving and tracking applications for ethical approval of research involving humans and will be extended to include applications for internal research funds in the fall of 2014. The system will eliminate much of the labor-intensive manipulation of files that is currently required to submit, receive and review an application, prepare for committee meetings and generate reports for various purposes. Internal funding was not available to defray the costs of this initiative; thus, the ICP funding was, and will continue to be, essential to its implementation and its ongoing success.

Among other functions, the Research Centre provides assistance to researchers to facilitate the submission of research grant applications and provides oversight for the financial management, compliance and reporting activities of their grants and awards. In the face of ever-increasing costs, ICP funding has been essential to enhancing the administrative support provided to researchers. These functions reduce the amount of time the researchers need to invest in the administration of their grant(s) and enable them to focus on research productivity and scholarship excellence. Without ICP funding, it would not be possible to sustain the level of service or the considerable efficiencies gained by locating these important functions within the Research Centre.

Another important outcome of the ICP funding is the grantsmanship mentoring that has been provided to AU researchers to assist them in developing their grant applications. Workshops and/or webinars hosted by program officers from SSHRC, NSERC and CIHR have been offered in an effort to keep researchers apprised of recent changes in funding programs and to increase their success rates in applying for federal funding. Other capacity building endeavors have also been initiated, including workshops/seminars on both quantitative and qualitative data management and analysis. These workshops/seminars have been open to faculty and students and have been deemed highly useful by both.

Regulatory Requirements. In addition to the preceding, funds received from the Federal ICP were used in part to support ethical review and compliance activities, including the operations of the Research Ethics Board (REB).

Responsibility for the administrative functions of the AU Research Ethics Board (REB) and its sub-committees rests with the Research Ethics Officer. ICP funding in this category was used primarily to support the functions of this role, which include but are not limited to

- conveying information to researchers, and to the Research Ethics Board and its sub-committee members, about relevant human ethics policies and guidelines;
- providing administrative support to the Research Ethics Board and its sub-committees;
- offering feedback to applicants on their applications, both prior to and after the Research Ethics Board review process; and
- tracking applications and ensuring compliance with applicable policies and guidelines.

*ICP funds reported here refers to the federal government's investment used to cover a portion of the indirect costs of research supported by the three federal funding agencies (the Canadian Institutes of Health Research, the Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council, and the Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council) at Universities and colleges, and at their affiliated research hospitals and institutes.