



ADMINISTRATIVE SUPPORT SERVICES

RECOMMENDATIONS REPORT

NOVEMBER 2024 | BUDGET OPTIMIZATION INITIATIVE



PROJECT OVERVIEW

BUDGET OPTIMIZATION INITIATIVE: ADMIN SUPPORT

The Budget Optimization Initiative for Administrative Support Services was launched in January 2024 to identify options and recommendations for enhancing and optimizing administrative support functions across Idaho State University.

Scope of Work:

- Research best practices in higher education administrative service models
- Meet with units to identify administrative support needs, issues, and opportunities
- Research consolidated and hybrid administrative support structures that emphasize shared services
- Evaluate workload across positions
- Inventory current software solutions and applications and related technology resources
- Identify opportunities for increased service, efficiency, efficacy, and budget savings while assuring optimal coverage, support, and service
- Identify opportunities for professional and career development and progression for administrative staff
- Analyze costs, benefits, and resource allocation implications
- Present recommendations

Work Group Members:

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What is our
FOCUS?

Historically, administrative positions focused on task-based activities such as typing and filing. The advent of technology has transformed these roles into more complex, multi-faceted positions requiring a broad range of skills, including data management, budgeting, and technology proficiency (Robert Half, n.d.). This shift has increased the workload and expectations of administrative professionals, contributing to higher turnover, especially when these roles are not treated as strategic resources within organizations.

Organizations that have adapted to these changes by investing in training, development, and viewing administrative staff as strategic assets have seen a decrease in turnover and an increase in productivity (Workforce Charm, 2024). Offering professional development opportunities is crucial, as 70% of employees are more likely to remain in roles with a clear commitment to learning and development (Awardco, n.d.). This approach not only slows down the loss of institutional knowledge but also creates a more positive and supportive work environment. While reflective of broader industry trends, the high turnover rate for administrative assistants at ISU highlights the evolving nature of these roles over the past few decades.

TASK & RESPONSIBILITY SURVEY HIGHLIGHT

Survey data collected from administrative support staff at Idaho State University in March 2024 shows the following highlights.



- 38 %** Reported experiencing burnout at or above half the time.
- 49 %** Reported that their workloads impact their work-life balance at or above half the time.
- 14 %** Reported that their job description matches what they are asked to do at or above half the time.
- 21 %** 5 year turn over trend rate among Administrative Assistants 1&2

The initiative's analysis is grounded in comprehensive data collected through various methods to capture a full spectrum of perspectives and insights.

Task and Responsibility Survey: This survey gathered detailed input from administrative staff across campus, assessing the frequency and nature of tasks such as office support, data management, project coordination, and financial record-keeping.

Supervisor Survey: Feedback from supervisors was essential in identifying the specific needs and gaps in administrative support across departments.

Website Feedback Form: We collected additional insights through an online feedback form made available on the university's website, allowing staff and faculty to contribute their thoughts on administrative support services and offer suggestions for improvement.

Stakeholder Meetings: Key university leadership groups were engaged through meetings with the Deans Council, Admin Council, Faculty Senate, Leadership Council, and Staff Council. These meetings provided critical feedback on the current administrative support structure and offered opportunities for open dialogue on potential improvements.

Administrative Support Personnel Focus Groups: These discussions facilitated by ISU professors Dr. Bolinger and Dr. Burch, allowed for in-depth exploration of specific administrative challenges and opportunities, providing qualitative data that enriched the quantitative findings from the surveys.

Internal Research and Benchmarking: The initiative incorporated turnover and salary analysis specific to ISU, as well as case studies, industry journals, and best practices from higher education to create a well-rounded understanding of administrative functions.



What is our
PROCESS?

7 Key Themes From the collected survey data, seven key themes emerged:



Need for Improved Consistency in Service Delivery | Theme from Data: Overburdened administrative staff.
Inconsistent, outdated processes can lead to perceptions of excessive workloads in some areas and underutilization in others. Standardizing procedures across departments will help ensure more equitable workloads and improve service consistency.



Importance of Collaboration and Interdepartmental Support | Theme from Data: Inefficient administrative processes.
Administrative processes often operate in silos, leading to inefficiencies. Enhancing collaboration and better integrating interdepartmental support will address this fragmentation and lead to smoother operations.



Demand for Enhanced Efficiency and Elimination of Redundancies | Theme from Data: Faculty & staff burnout.
Redundant tasks and inefficient administrative workflows partly drive faculty and staff burnout. Streamlining these processes will reduce redundancies, mitigate burnout, and improve overall efficiency.



Need for Robust Standardization of Processes | Theme from Data: Overburdened administrative staff.
The lack of standardization across various administrative tasks results in discrepancies, errors, and inefficiencies. Establishing robust standards will ensure consistency and reliability in administrative functions.



Training and Development for Administrative Staff | Theme from Data: Communication & training gaps.
Significant gaps in communication and training prevent administrative staff from performing at their best. Offering comprehensive training and ongoing development will empower staff and close these critical gaps.



Priority for Leveraging Technology | Theme from Data: Technology & resource limitations.
Current technology and resource alignment challenges can impact secure and efficient data processes and management. Addressing these challenges by fostering collaboration between ITS and administrative support roles will help to reduce manual data entry and improve efficiencies. This approach will maximize the potential of existing platforms, enhancing data security, usability, and reporting accuracy.



Succession Planning and Career Ladders to Retain Talent | Theme from Data: Role misalignment & lack of clarity.
Misalignment between roles and responsibilities and a lack of clarity in job descriptions contribute to turnover, dissatisfaction, and inequities. Implementing clear career ladders and succession planning will help retain administrative talent and ensure continuity in operations.



PRIMARY INITIAL RECOMMENDATION

A MATRIX ORGANIZATIONAL STRUCTURE

A matrix structure for administrative support services, with functional administrative expertise in four key areas housed in an administrative support core would bring equitable and consistent service across the university. Subject matter experts will provide core services for the following areas:

- Human Resources
- Finance and Purchasing
- Information Technology
- Training, Systems and Process Improvement

This will provide embedded departmental administrative support with the increased capacity to focus their services on local administrative needs such as customer service, scheduling, marketing and communications, events, and unit specific tasks.

This would develop two key areas of support, one that is department specific and one that is focused on the systems and processes that affect the campus as a whole.

DEPARTMENT
LEVEL
SUPPORT

UNIVERSITY
LEVEL
SUPPORT

What is our
WHY?

OPTIMIZED USE OF RESOURCES

- Maximizes administrative support staff deployment to ensure efficient and equitable support for all departments, including those without dedicated administrative staff.
- Reduces FTE and budget over time through natural attrition and increased training, system and process improvement, and other efficiencies.
- Provides greater flexibility in deploying staff to areas of greatest need and opportunity.
- Targeted Departmental Support
- Shifts administrative focus from generalized to department-specific needs, easing burdens on faculty and staff by reducing unnecessary administrative tasks.

CAREER PATHWAYS AND PROFESSIONAL DEVELOPMENT

- Establishes clear career pathways with defined expertise areas and cross-training, allowing for staff development and mobility.
- Implements a coordinated training and development program, supporting enhanced efficiency and efficacy, career progression, and enhancing employee engagement.
- Supports succession planning and strengthens onboarding and offboarding processes for a smoother workforce transition.

UNIVERSITY-WIDE STANDARDIZATION AND IMPROVEMENT

- Leverages a centralized team to lead training initiatives, system improvements, and process standardization for consistent support across the university.
- Promotes the sharing of best practices while preserving localized support for unique departmental needs.



RESEARCH-BACKED EFFICIENCY

- Aligns with research findings advocating for standardized, efficient central support functions that enhance university operations and reduce redundancy.

STREAMLINED REPORTING STRUCTURE

- Maintains direct reporting lines for administrative roles to their respective department supervisors, ensuring accountability and alignment with departmental goals.

LONG-TERM FINANCIAL BENEFITS

- Though requiring an initial investment, the proposed structure is projected to yield net budget savings over time through optimized resource distribution and streamlined processes.

IMPLEMENTATION STEPS

HOW TO MOVE FORWARD

Establish a New Change Management Team

A new Training and Systems Improvement Team will serve as the flagship team for the Administrative Support Core. The group's initial focus will be on developing a comprehensive change management plan and developing the early stages of a technology implementation plan.

Once the change management plan is established, the team will split into two specialized groups:

- Training and Systems Improvement Team: This team will continue leading systems improvement and continuous improvement initiatives, as well as providing workplace training.
- ITS Support Team: This team will focus on providing ITS support and platform development, collaborating closely with the Training and Systems Improvement Team.

Following this step, dedicated HR and Finance support teams will be launched to enhance support in these specific areas.

Develop a Comprehensive Change Management Plan, including:

- Meetings with units and departments
- Desk audits and documentation to clarify responsibilities and support areas
- Budget implications and detailed budget analysis to manage costs effectively throughout the transition
- Key performance indicators (KPIs) to track success, focusing on service quality efficiency, employee satisfaction, and cost savings
- An assessment plan and timeline
- Pilot group testing to test the new structure before rolling it out campus-wide
- Implementation plan and timeline to guide the process with clear objectives, timelines, and accountability
- Communication plan, timeline, and phases for implementation to ensure smooth execution





What must we
ADDRESS?

Address key questions and needs:

- Career Ladders: Establish clear paths for career progression.
- Centralization vs. Decentralization: Determine which tasks can be centralized and which need to remain decentralized.
- Equitable Administrative Support: Ensure fair and consistent administrative support across all areas of campus.
- Reporting Lines: Clarify reporting structures to improve communication and accountability.
- Specialized Accreditation Needs: Maintain attention to accreditation requirements that require specific administrative support.
- Specialized Areas with Unique Needs: Ensure support for areas that require case-specific approaches.
- Education and Communication: Provide clear communication and education about the change process to ensure buy-in and understanding across all departments. This will require dedicated resources to do properly.
- Physical Footprint Considerations: Take into account that departments and colleges are spread across multiple buildings on campus with few centralized locations. Any changes must consider how the physical distribution of departments impacts customer service and ensure that essential services are accessible despite these physical separations.
- Commitment to Service and Work Environment: Throughout the process, prioritize a commitment to improving both the quality of service provided and the work environment for staff, ensuring that the changes lead to better support for the campus community.