

# New Collaborations are Possible and Priceless

*By Denise Clark, Sue O'Brien, Bryony Wakefield and Julie Ward*



## **Making connections**

We all have a story about a new connection made at a conference but what makes this story come alive is that the connections you will read about turned into real, instant, sustainable collaborations, new collegial partnerships, new strategic research endeavours, and new trusted friendships. We would like to share our story to high-

light how a chance meeting can (and does!) turn into ongoing collaborations, engagement, and continued professional development.

## **Impact**

Once upon a time in a hospitality suite at the NCURA 54<sup>th</sup> Annual Meeting, three girls from Australia – Bryony Wakefield, Sue O'Brien and Julie

Ward were experiencing the new and exciting 'hospitality suite hopping' activities that happen at NCURA meetings and randomly bumped into a lady dressed up as an Indian, which turned out to be Denise Clark from the University of Maryland. Bryony, Sue and Julie spoke to Denise for around 5 minutes, posed for a few photos, traded business cards and then went about their night.

And so, the relationship began, with this impromptu exchange of smiles, laughs and intrigue. In an instant, it was obvious that they had the synergy, personality and desire to build a new professional network.

## Knowledge Transfer

One day after unpacking from the Annual Meeting, Denise came across those beloved business cards and had an instant flashback, remembering the three Australian research administrators; their charisma, enthusiasm, marked interest in NCURA and its professional development opportunities, and . . . . .their accents. Following up on the discussions that occurred in those now infamous five minutes, Denise reached out to Julie and that is when they started to seriously discuss potential topics for Denise to present at the Australasian Research Management Society (ARMS) Conference in Adelaide in September 2013. After months of email correspondence and potential session description writings (tweaking and re-tweaking), Denise's abstracts were selected for inclusion in the ARMS program. Filled with excitement about this amazing positive outcome, Julie proposed and spearheaded an itinerary for Denise to visit Australia and share research administration knowledge above and beyond what was confirmed through ARMS. Julie organized a visit to her institution – the University of New South Wales – for Denise to meet with the Executive team within the Division of Research and to present to over 60 senior research administrators on topics such as US compliance and the audit processes. Denise and Julie then went to Adelaide where Denise was a co-presenter in a pre-conference workshop on “US-Australia Research Collaborations: Whole-of-life Financial Management to Support Successful Outcomes”. Denise subsequently delivered the two accepted abstracts as presentations at the ARMS conference; “Recognising Research Management as a Global Profession” and “US Collaborations – How do I Provide Adequate Oversight of a Collaboration/Subaward”. These presentations were well attended, well received, extremely in-

teractive, and highlighted the importance of sharing knowledge across the globe. It was clear that the NCURA method for knowledge transfer, through its professional development programs and commitment to establishing research administration as a recognized global profession, was a model for other international research administration organizations.

## Collaboration

Bryony, Sue and Julie also have their own story to tell. . . . How did the three of them end up in that hospitality suite that Tuesday night? Well, believe it or not, they didn't know each other before meeting at the NCURA conference. Bryony works at the University of Melbourne, Sue at the University of Queensland in Brisbane and Julie at the University of New South Wales in Sydney. They were brought together by happenstance, or otherwise known as the NCURA Annual Meeting. Together they bonded and manoeuvred through the intimidating Annual Meeting; weaving in and out amongst 2,000 other attendees; not knowing anyone else, not knowing the environment; new to the breadth of concurrent sessions and discussion groups, but carrying a common thread. They were hungry for professional development opportunities - for themselves and for their Australian constituents that had the foresight to invest in their travel to the US. They were thrown together by

coincidence but walked away with an undeniable new desire and determination to make a difference for new members attending their first NCURA Annual Meeting. They saw and experienced the value and opportunities that were available to the attendees of the Annual Meeting. The three new colleagues promised to keep in touch after the NCURA conference and they did. They sought out the opportunity to express their adventure and make an impact on others by sharing their experience and telling their story as guests in the Johns Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health **blog** in the three-part series titled ‘Australia & The USA: So Far Yet So Close’. They didn't stop there; they built on their new collegiality and submitted an abstract for a session that would tell their tales, to be presented at the ARMS conference in Adelaide in September 2013. Their session on “How to Be Seen and Collaborate at an International Conference: How Three Aussie Girls Survived and Thrived at NCURA” highlighted their experience at NCURA and provided advice and tips and tricks for other colleagues to attend an international conference. Were they nervous? Yes. Did they have reservations about presenting together for the first time? Yes. Did they knock it out of the park? Yes. The audience was engaged, enthralled and extremely envious of the story told by the otherwise three nomadic research administrators, brought together by fate, and their future sealed

by their desire to cease the moment and take advantage of the opportunity to grow professionally, shoot beyond their normal comfort level and share their experiences with the hopes that others will make that first move. . . . reach out to someone new! Make that first gesture, have the confidence to seek out others, build your own personal network.

## Connecting

In our journey, we learned that in order to facilitate and enable sound research that will impact society as a whole, we need to be supporting our researchers to the fullest extent possible. As such, we as research administrators need to establish relationships that will encourage, empower and enhance our ability to work, together in

### 7 Steps to Expand Your Network



a more global, cohesive, and inviting environment. Engagement with research administrators through our sister society networks provides a platform to share best practices and approaches to research best practices on a global scale.

We brainstormed seven steps that can help to expand your network and potentially develop new collaborations. These steps are drawn from our recent shared experiences which began at the 54th NCURA Annual Meeting and continue today. Enhance your personal potential by reaching out to someone; emphasize your emotional intelligence by engaging in stimulating conversation; excel towards the unknown by challenging your perceived boundaries; enhance your participation by seizing the volunteer opportunities; encourage yourself to step out of your comfort zone; enable change through collaboration; envision the endless possibilities that this adventure can produce!



(L-R) Bryony Wakefield, University of Melbourne; Julie Ward, University of New South Wales; and Sue O'Brien, University of Queensland gather at AM55 in Washington, DC.

Denise Clark, University of Maryland, College Park, presents at the Australasian Research Management Society (ARMS) Conference in Adelaide in September 2013.



## Priceless

Chance, serendipity, fate - whatever and however new connections are made, the rewards are only as big as the drive and energy you put into them. So, say hello to that random person at a conference, spark a discussion, enable a new futurist path... who knows you could be presenting at next year's conference with them! You could be establishing a fellowship exchange program that will enlighten and revitalize your entire organization!

## Future Collaboration

As the saying goes, "What have you done for me lately?" So we all met and have had some interim success stories. How do we plan on keeping up the momentum? Funny thing... our next adventure is already underway and the hot air balloon is ready to launch. We are in the midst of participating in the planning for the 1<sup>st</sup> NCURA International Region Meeting in April 2014. We are strategizing on how to utilize our existing network to build an invigorating program and to entice participants to engage in activities outside the meeting venue. The University of Maryland is just a metro ride away. The DC metro area is just a stone's throw away... ■

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