1. How did you enjoy the Annual meeting in August 2013? b) Were you able to meet new colleagues and learn new things?

a) I really enjoyed NCURA’s 55th Annual Meeting. I warmly recommend to all my international colleagues to participate in this event. This was the third time that I had the opportunity to participate and the first time that I had the opportunity to be a speaker. I think the NCURA conferences are always really excellently organized. I loved the atmosphere, the American colleague’s devotion and professionalism. Meanwhile in Finland we do not have formal education system for research administrators; NCURA provided an excellent environment for me to learn new innovative ways to manage my daily routine work and to understand our scientists’ needs better.

b) Yes, I was able to meet new colleagues e.g., from Qatar, Japan, China, Sweden, Norway and of course from the United States. Conference discussion groups, regional hospitality suites and the international dinner provided excellent opportunities for networking.

2. a) What were the greatest benefits at the meeting? b) Were you able to put any of the things you learned into practice when you returned home?

a) Designated workshops in the international track on US funding opportunities were excellent. I received valuable information related to funding agencies like NIH and NSF as well as learning about new grant opportunities that I may not otherwise have heard of. Being a non-native English speaker, my communication skills and my “professional vocabulary” have developed significantly. It was nice to see friends from earlier NCURA conferences and to share personal experiences.

I really enjoyed the workshop “How to be an NCURA presenter”. Workshop presenters carefully explained what skills are required to be a good presenter, how to engage the audience, and how to create ideal learning and discussion environments for the audience. I admire the American presenters’ passion, sense of humor, and the harmonized teamwork of the presenters (Judy Fredenberg et al.).
b) We organized a training at Aalto University on “How to apply for Research funding from the United States” right after the conference. Legal issues related to US funding was also one of the focus points of the training, and our scientists and professors shared their experiences on NSF and NIH funding. The course topic attracted a surprisingly large audience. During the course, additional information was requested regarding the Department of Energy and Department of Defense Funding opportunities. It would be great to hear more about these in future NCURA conferences.

3. Are there similarities or many differences with your programs and programs in the U.S?

The terms, rules and eligibility criteria for grant applications are significantly different between the US and Europe. It is a really positive development that US and EU funding agencies (like NSF and ERC) are providing joint funding opportunities for joint programs and projects and staff exchange, and they are making attempts to try to harmonize their rules and eligibility criteria and to share experiences.

Differences:
- Misconduct or improper use of the funds is really rare in Finland due to the really low level of corruption…
- Different approach for border control.
- In Europe, the employment rules, social security, health and work safety are much stricter than in the US.
- Our funding agencies mainly provide web and internet based support, and we contact them via email.
- Paper submissions no longer exist anymore, e.g., Horizon 2020, our national funding agencies (TEKES, Academy of Finland).
- One major difference is also that the grant applications are submitted by the individual scientist in the name of their organization and NOT by the centralized office.

4. Are there any suggestions you have that would have helped you with your NCURA experiences?

International delegates would like to visit some local Washington DC universities, and research institutes / funding agencies. Can NCURA provide organized visit opportunities prior to or after the conference, e.g., a visit to NIH, etc.?

During the breakfast round table discussions, unfortunately I had a negative experience related to the NCURA- EARMA fellowship discussion table (year 2012)……I would expect a little bit more direction from the persons responsible for the table. International delegates joining the table were not provided the opportunity to introduce themselves, to speak or to express their opinions……