

The most salient learning from my ARMS 2025 Conference experience is the need to be adaptable in an environment filled with constant uncertainty and strife. Coming from a small team at a small medical research institute, it was a validating to hear that other research management professionals have been similarly struggling. In saying this, it was inspiring to see the variety of creative solutions being developed and implemented.

1. Futureproofing for success

There were two presentations from *Waipapa Taumata Rau, University of Auckland* (presented by Lani McNamara, and Johnnie Belinda Cluff) that resonated with me—these were complementary researcher development programs that focused on building funder/scheme agnostic support to enable agility during times of change. Moreover, these programs focussed on promoting collegiality and utilising the expertise of researchers as peers to alleviate some of the burden experienced by the central office. Reflecting on my own processes as the coordinator of the pre-award portfolio at VCCRI, working with researchers to develop an early idea that can be refined and moulded to suit a plethora of funding opportunities could potentially alleviate workload and associated stress experienced by both the researchers and the Grants Office, if not by producing higher quality drafts, then at least by having researchers spending more time considering their project.

2. Creating a culture that values research impact

Research impact is a rapidly growing and changing field. Funders are constantly redefining impact assessment requirements, of which are poorly aligned from funder to funder. What I observed from the conference was that each person who presented on research impact, were the change champions at their organisations, and operated in environments where they were under-resourced, or had poor buy-in from the executive level to researchers. Approaches were holistic and embedded into existing processes to ensure uptake and success. Two standout presentations were by Dr Helen Slaney from La Trobe University, and Dr Emma Barnes from Griffith University. Both change champions within their organisations, their approach was to actively educate researchers on the importance of tracking impact and creating impact narratives, while also consulting with researchers to create measures of success meaningful to them, within their respective fields. This meant that come time of a grant application, researchers were not starting from zero.

Conclusion

Upon returning, I have shared my learnings with my team to ensure they are up to date with current practices. Moving forward, this will help our office consider how to build capabilities in researchers to create a thriving and sustainable environment that champions impact planning in proposal development. This will accelerate VCCRI's translational impact, ultimately benefiting patients and the broader medical research community.