

University of Pittsburgh

Streamlining Researcher
Access to Funding



University of
Pittsburgh



For the University of Pittsburgh, the tools and automated workflows enabled by Pivot allow the university to connect more researchers to more funding opportunities, deepen collaboration, and increase the number and quality of grant applications.

"Pivot helps me to manage and send large amounts of targeted funding information. It's easier for researchers to find it, and act on it."

Ryan Champagne, University of Pittsburgh



About University of Pittsburgh

Founded in 1787, the University of Pittsburgh is a member of the Association of American Universities (AAU), which comprises 62 preeminent doctorate-granting research institutions in North America. Pitt people have defeated polio, unlocked the secrets of DNA, led the world in organ transplantation, and pioneered TV and heavier-than-air flight, among numerous other accomplishments.

Scaling Up to Serve Researchers

As the Grants Development Coordinator for the Office of Research at University of Pittsburgh, Ryan Champagne's primary responsibility is to find and distribute research funding opportunities. "When I was hired, it was a newly created position, so there wasn't any preexisting workflow, any set routine of work tasks, or even a very concrete vision as to what I would do," recalls Champagne. "I was to be available as a resource to the entire university."

"I needed a way to have a better pulse on the most relevant new information, and to effectively communicate it to our stakeholders," shares Champagne. For that, he uses Pivot from Ex Libris. "Pivot helped me first, to find the funding that exists. I came in not knowing very much about the federal funding landscape, all of the other funding sources, and the breadth of all the programs that researchers can apply to. It's a huge amount of information. Pivot helps me to manage and send it in a way that makes it easy for researchers to find it and apply."

Automating to Get the Word Out

Pivot provides a central web site and repository that allows researchers at the university to find information about grants available. More importantly, the tools in Pivot allow Champagne to create and automate the workflows he needs to manage the massive job he has.

From looking at the web traffic, he knew that users were visiting the site, but not logging in and conducting searches. So he takes advantage of Pivot's newsletter feature to create newsletters for different groups. The newsletters are automated and scheduled in Pivot, allowing him to send out more than 100 newsletters every week with minimal effort. "Pivot functions as a database and a resource for the weekly email newsletters," explains Champagne. "That in turn puts a certain rhythm into my job that's now well-defined and well-maintained."

A Regular, Repeatable Process

Two features of Pivot, Curated Lists and Saved Searches, play a huge role in tailoring the information for specific audiences without Champagne having to re-invent the wheel each week.

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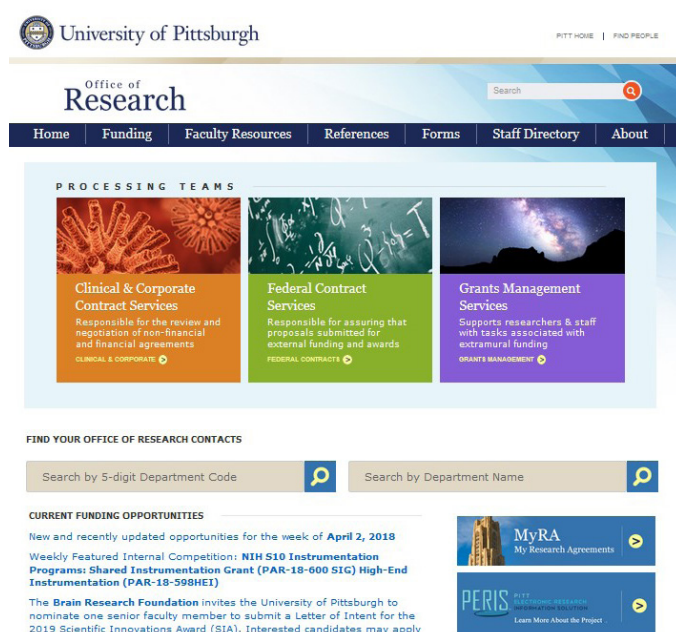
Ryan Champagne, University of Pittsburgh

By creating structured searches and reusing them, he builds, maintains and updates lists of funding opportunities specific to each discipline and audience. He then links to the curated lists in the weekly newsletters, which as he points out, is much more efficient than building web pages from scratch.

"For example, working with the information structure in Pivot, I'll search for all funding that relates to a high-level search term like 'engineering.' I save the search to be specific to federal U.S. funding, and also look at it through another lens to pull in the private funding. Weekly, Pivot shows me what has just been updated from the U.S. government by way of funding programs related to engineering, and what's come in from foundations or corporate funding. I combine the results of those two searches, and pull together the information that is most relevant to our faculty into one place. That's the information I push out.

"I take the same approach when I'm asked to accomplish specific initiatives and tasks. For example, I can curate a list to highlight particular funding programs that are of interest to our leadership, and make that information available to the faculty.

"On a weekly basis I log in, check my main saved searches, clear out the preceding week's lists and add new information, then use those to push out newsletters and tweets."



Building Connections Within the University

Pivot recently added the ability to add internal funding opportunities, which has offered a more streamlined way to disseminate the information. "Offices have been approaching me to add their information into Pivot when we have university-sponsored seed grant programs," Champagne states. By bringing greater visibility to those valuable opportunities, Champagne has also been able to better-connect with offices around the university that are good partners for his work.

In addition, he notes, "I'm able to share the admin access with other offices and people who want to take the time to work with Pivot by themselves. They want to create their own newsletters and be more in touch with faculty. Our Clinical and Translational Science Institute uses Pivot to help its investigators. And the libraries have become more engaged with Pivot to help faculty in the humanities."

Increasing Researcher Engagement

While the newsletters are helpful, researchers at the university also have direct access to the information in Pivot. "A lot of people are surprised and happy to hear that the university pays for them to have access, so they can search for funding on their own," Champagne explains. "Often, these are individual faculty who want to be aware when certain programs are being updated, or early-career faculty who are starting to get new labs off of the ground. Faculty are also happy to hear that it's something their students can use. Each semester, I schedule two to four workshops where I'm showing people how to use Pivot. At one of these sessions, a faculty member invited me to speak to a seminar class of first-year doctoral students."

Measurable Impact

Pivot provides reports that enable Champagne to measure levels of engagement and usage by faculty, and to gain insight into the funding opportunities that researchers are interested in. "We have 12,000 to 15,000 page views a month," he reports. "I'm noticing more people are saving specific programs for updates and alerts. It's satisfying to know that the information I'm sending out isn't going into a void."

"My job is connecting faculty to funding, including new and novel funding streams to support their projects. That involves getting information to them, but also helping to coordinate, whenever I can, their readiness to respond. We're a research university; there are departments here where faculty is expected to fund X amount or X percent of their salary through grants. We've had some department chairs comment that they know people are applying to programs."



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