



Sounds of eRA Podcast Transcription

Part seven of a twelve part series where Edward Johnson Jr. (a.k.a. Eddie) sits down with Sandra Nordahl, President, Society of Research Administrators International (SRA), to discuss the mission of SRA and the effects of sequestration on research administration.

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Sequestration-1-2-3-Punch

Eddie: Welcome to another “*Sounds of the eRA.*” My name is Edward Johnson, a.k.a. Eddie, and I'm the President of InfoEd International. We're going to be speaking today with Sandra Nordahl. She's the president of SRA. We're going to be speaking about SRA's mission and inner workings, and also the effects of sequestration on research administration and its effects on the world around us. Hello, Sandra.

Sandra: Hi, Eddie. Thank you for asking me to participate in your podcast.

Eddie: Glad you were able to accommodate this. Have you seen or I suspect there are cost involved with even managing see frustration and I guess most people would argue they spent too much times – too much time in meetings currently. I can imagine the meetings that are taking place now to handle this. Budget meetings generally tend to be not easy. They can get fairly involved in a normal environment. So then, those people are fighting for the same funds or maybe, fighting for, maybe slight increase of funds or budget that they had the previous year.

Now the money that the institutions got spent in terms of time because they suspect it takes a lot longer now to actually figure out how you're going to cut things. And what are you going to cut? And what decisions you're going to make? Have you seen any more time if you will being dedicated to managing how this cuts might be implemented as opposed to under normal situations?

Sandra: I didn't know that, our budgeting process here has gotten a lot more complex. We put forth our regular budget, then we have to put forth different scenarios based on different cuts. I really don't want to go into all the details of that but it is a lot. Certainly when you have a robust economy and quote unquote the – like I don't think this has ever happened in my lifetime, money is not an object. It's much easier to do your departmental budget.

But when times are tough, you really have to look long and hard at what is going into that budget and how it would be applied and what you would do if funding wasn't forthcoming. It's not a pretty process. It's – it's one that keeps me awake at night. I really appreciate each and every staff member that I have and my job is to help them do their jobs well and to do our job – our departments job well for our organization and the idea of losing one of them is gut wrenching to me.

The regulations that go with everything in research administration as many of my colleagues will tell you it doesn't ever get reduced it just increases. So you're trying to streamline, create efficiencies, be knowledgeable on new things that are coming out. Jan Shamrock does a periodic stress survey on research administrators, which might be a topic for a future podcast for you.

But it can be quite stressful at times. You're working as hard as you can, trying to do things to make things happen for people in the best possible way and then you're faced with these daunting situations such as sequestration, budget reduction. Here in California our state budget is just finally starting to turn around after many years of being in the red. I can't even remember the last time that we weren't in the red. I think this year might be one of the first year years that we aren't.

And we have been cut significantly here at the University and that does have an effect on us. We've laid off faculty for many, many years. This year is one of the first years that we're going to be – I think for the past couple of years we've been able to hire less than a handful of people or even less than two handfuls for sure. This year is one of the first years that we are being able to hire faculty and I don't know that sequestration isn't going to negate a lot that. So it's really a painful process.

Eddie: And looking forward at it – and again, I apologize – oh, I apologize if some of these numbers are wrong, and it's kind of hard to actually get the exact numbers. The only numbers that I see consistently are 1.5 trillion over 10 years, but if you look at what they're projecting these cuts are going to be basically this year is the smallest of the years being cut. This year, based up on the numbers that I was able to find, you're cut around, say \$70 billion dollars.

Next year is projected to be almost 95. The following year, like 120 billion and by the 10th year out in 2021, is going to land at the 150 billion. So this is not a schedule that going to be getting better. Arguably from the numbers that I have the largest change in terms of reduction is going to be 2014. The other one seems to be averaging, yeah, maybe 10 maybe 15 to 20 billion a year if I say that like it's nothing, where the last year again, ends up about 150 billion. Next year is really going to be rough, if people are reacting to this year's, strap in.

Sandra: It's going to be devastating if it continues on the current trend because the actions are getting impact research funding and that will have long-term effects. It will have long-term economic effects for the United States. I know there are a lot of unknowns about the sequestration cuts and how they'll be implemented in the future, and it's always interesting to see what actually does happen.

I am not looking forward to future years of sequestration that is for sure. I think it's going to really impact higher education, high-tech are what we call the high-tech organizations, the biotech industry. The economy in San Diego is largely developed around defense, and high-tech. We have a lot of hospitals in our region. We have three universities in our region and many nonprofits and they all will be affected. And we have a large defense, as I mentioned, industry here. And the ramifications of sequestration are going to be not pretty.

Eddie: Sandra, this has been absolutely fantastic stuff. I am very excited about the information we've been able to collect from you. I want to point out that on the SRA website, on the home page, there's an entry point to the sequestration resource center that SRA's been able to put together. It is a fantastic place to go look and see some real world examples of the things that are going on with sequestration. I would encourage you to go and take a look at that as well because this information is ever evolving and SRA does a great job of keeping that updated. I would encourage you to bookmark that site and look at it periodically to see what's new.

Again, Sandra, I really appreciate your time, fantastic information.

Sandra: Great, thank you so much for having me.