

Implementing Developmental Roles to Strengthen Workforce Engagement and Research Operations

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1. Background

Historically, regulatory and data staff followed separate career ladders and could apply for the program manager (PM) role, which oversees both regulatory and data operations; however, their experiences were largely limited to either regulatory or data responsibilities. As a result, staff entering the PM role may lack cross-functional exposure and were expected to manage complex programmatic responsibilities without prior integrated experience.

Early-career regulatory roles provided limited opportunities to develop portfolio management skills, while more senior roles required immediate oversight of full study portfolios, creating steep transitions, and limited internal growth opportunities. During this period, the organization also experienced challenges with retention and employee satisfaction related to limited promotional pathways, resulting in frequent hiring, loss of institutional knowledge, and reduced continuity in study oversight.

2. Goals

The underlying premise of this initiative was that clearer and more supportive career pathways would improve retention, enable deeper operational expertise, increase capacity to manage larger and more complex portfolios, and ultimately strengthen regulatory and data compliance, as measured by audit performance.

Additional goals were to establish a clearer and more sustainable career progression framework and to better prepare staff for cross-functional leadership roles, including readiness for the PM role.

3. Solutions and Methods

To address these challenges, several new roles were introduced over time. The senior regulatory specialist role was added within post-activation to create an additional internal growth opportunity for experienced regulatory specialists who wished to advance without transitioning into pre-activation or PM roles.

The regulatory associate role was introduced as a bridge between regulatory assistant and regulatory specialist, allowing staff to manage a limited number of studies while gaining exposure to both pre- and post-activation activities and early portfolio management experience.

The program lead (PL) role was implemented as an intermediate position for senior research coordinators and senior regulatory specialists, providing programmatic oversight and structured cross-functional exposure. This role was designed to prepare staff for future PM responsibilities.

Evaluation methods included review of retention and promotion rates, employee engagement data from internal surveys, longitudinal tracking of study volume and portfolio complexity, and review of internal audit outcomes.

4. Outcomes

Early outcomes demonstrated increased internal mobility. Retention rates and turnover rates improved following implementation. Employee engagement survey results reflected positive shifts in perceived

career growth opportunities and job satisfaction. In parallel, study volume increased over time, suggesting improved organizational capacity to manage a larger and more complex portfolio. Audit findings also showed improved regulatory and data compliance following implementation.

5. Lessons Learned and Future Directions

The program lead and regulatory associate roles emerged as critical bridges for developing integrated skill sets and reducing readiness gaps. Key lessons highlight the importance of early portfolio management exposure and structured cross-functional experience prior to assuming PM responsibilities.

Future directions include refining the program lead role to provide greater exposure to PM responsibilities and continued monitoring of workforce and quality metrics.

Figure

	2021	2022	2023	2024	2025
RAU Retention rates	63%	50%	84%	97%	94%
DCU Retention rates	74%	75%	89%	94%	98%
RAU Promotion rates	10%	9%	8%	18%	8%
DCU Promotion rates	39%	39%	27%	0%	10%
RAU Perceptyx Favorability Score	53%	79%	92%	87%	88%
DCU Perceptyx Favorability Score	83%	83%	86%	90%	90%
Number of Active Studies	382	404	454	487	503
RAU IAC Findings	710	695	334	252	330