



FAST
INDIA

Research Support Functionalities

Survey Results

**A survey to understand challenges and opportunities
for Research Management in India**

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 **Contents**

1. Introduction.....	3
2. About the Survey.....	4
3. Survey landscape.....	4
4. Summary of Survey results.....	4
5. Survey Findings.....	5
6. Section 1: Professional background of respondents.....	5
7. Section 2: Professional support received by respondents....	7
8. Section 3: Respondents' work ecosystems.....	8
9. Section 4: Professional development of respondents.....	10
10. Section 5: Improving the Research Management ecosystem	11
11. Conclusion.....	13

Introduction

Research support functions are crucial in enabling and enhancing research activities in academic and research institutions. They provide administrative and logistical support to researchers, facilitate collaborations and partnerships, manage grants and funding, and promote technology transfer and commercialisation of research outcomes. Merged under the broad umbrella of Research Management, these activities provide professional support at their institutions for researchers to take full advantage of emerging scientific opportunities and collaborations.

Literature backs the role of professional Research Management activities positively impacting research outcomes by reducing the administrative burden on researchers.^{1,2} In the context of Indian academic and research institutions, the need for robust research support structures such as Research Management Offices, cannot be overstated given that research productivity and innovation are becoming increasingly important. Support from Research offices has been deemed essential for successful outcomes by researchers and the leadership of academic institutions.³

Research Management is not a new concept in India, but its development can still be considered nascent. Institutions such as the National Centre for Biological Sciences (NCBS), Translational Health Science and Technology Institute (THSTI), and Indian Institute of Science Education and Research (IISER) are recognised as pioneers in the field of Research Management.⁴ They led the institutionalisation of Research Management towards the latter half of the 2010s. Today, a significant number of government and private research institutes have Research Management functions in various forms.

However, critical gaps have been identified in the working ecosystem of Research Management professionals based at Indian academic/ research institutes through consultations and secondary sources.⁵ It has come to light that research management professionals in India do not receive the optimum professional support, despite playing a crucial role in research outcomes.

It is thus vital to collect relevant data on the state of these professionals and on the profession itself. The lack of information available on the internet (via publications or articles) on the current status of Research Management professionals in India is yet another reason to compile and present data gathered from primary sources. For this purpose, FAST India conducted an online survey to illustrate the status quo of the Research Management profession in India.

1 https://books.google.co.in/books/about/Research_Management.html?id=2PvpDQAAQBAJ&pg=PA59#v=onepage&q&f=false

2 <https://files.eric.ed.gov/fulltext/EJ1162041.pdf>

3 <https://wellcome.org/sites/default/files/research-management-in-africa-and-india.pdf>

4 <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6392150/>

5 <https://europepmc.org/backend/ptpmcrender.fcgi?accid=PMC6392150&blobtype=pdf>

About the Survey

An online survey was conducted to understand the working of Research Management professionals employed at Indian research/ academic institutions in April/ May 2023. The survey questions ranged from exploring the professional background of the respondents, their work ecosystem, the professional support they received, and how they envision Research Management to improve in India. The survey questions comprised of objective as well as subjective questions.

The survey defines professionals working as Research Managers, Fundraising professionals, IP professionals, Research administrative support staff, Industry Liaisons, Research Integrity professionals, Alumni network managers, Grant managers, Research communicators or any other roles related to research management, support and dissemination as Research Management professionals.

Survey landscape

The survey was circulated through personal emails sent to Research Management professionals based at Indian academic/ research institutes (government and private) as well as social media. The professionals were encouraged to share the survey questionnaire within their networks as well.

The survey received responses from 20 participants with diverse backgrounds and experience levels. Considering the limited number of professionals working in these roles in India, (as indicated in Section 1 of the Survey Findings), the number of survey responses received is sufficient for analysis. Additionally, even the All India Survey on Higher Education (AISHE) report⁶ includes data on the number of teachers, librarians, and administrative staff, but it does not specifically mention research management professionals.

Summary of Survey Results

The results of the survey showed lack of institutional support received by the respondents in addition to inadequate compensations and unclear career trajectories. It is interesting to note that these factors have already been highlighted⁷ as crucial to building a cadre of Research Management professionals but almost 5 years on, these issues still exist.

⁶ <https://aishe.gov.in/aishe/viewDocument.action?documentId=322>

⁷ <https://www.ncbi.nlm.nih.gov/pmc/articles/PMC6392150/>

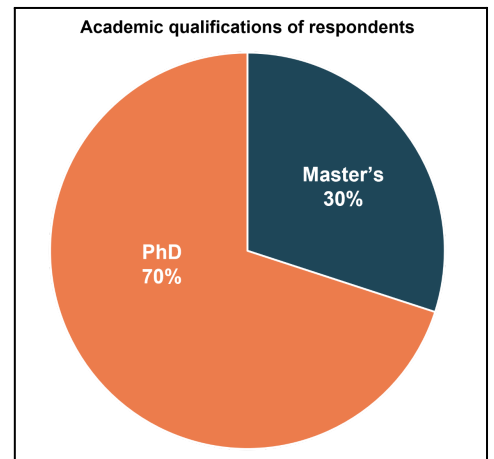
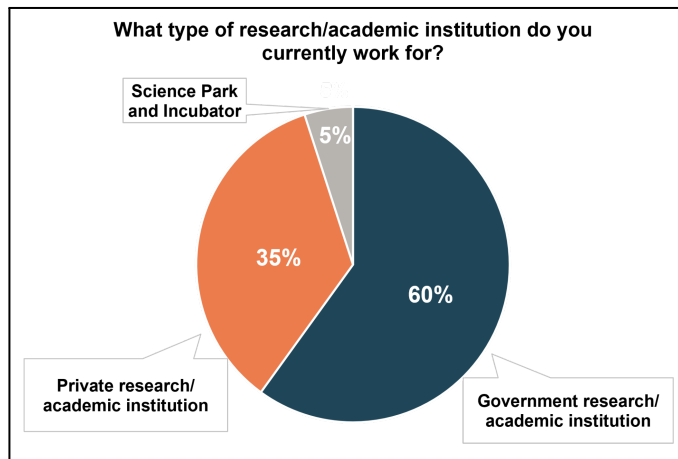
Survey Findings

The survey findings have been divided into 5 sections as follows:

1. Professional background of respondents
2. Professional support received by respondents
3. Respondents' work ecosystem
4. Professional development of respondents
5. How to improve the research management ecosystem in India?

Section 1: Professional background of respondents

The first section of the survey analyses the professional and academic background of the respondents along with their experience levels and roles prior to getting involved in research support activities. It further investigates the sample size of professionals working in Research Management roles in India.

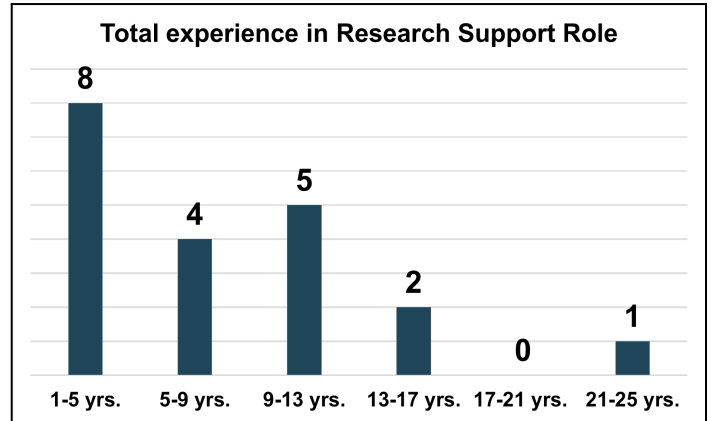
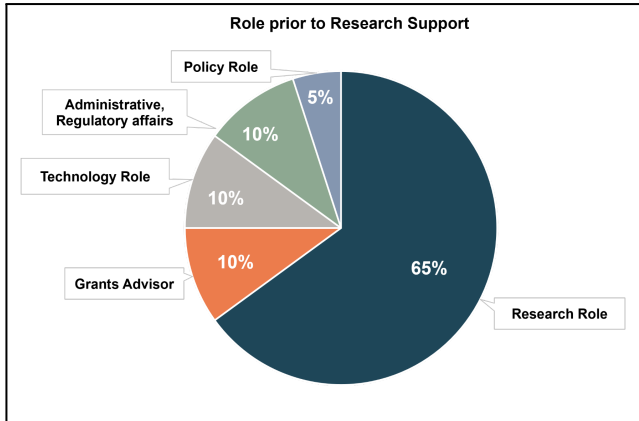


The above graphs show the professional and academic background of the respondents. While 60% of the respondents were employed at Government research/ academic institutions, 35% were employed at Private research/ academic institutions. One respondent was employed at a Science Park.

With regards to the academic qualifications possessed by respondents, 70% were PhD holders and 30% were Master's degree holders.

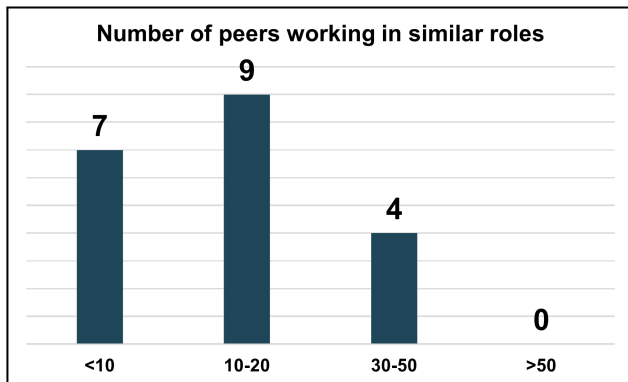
Implications of the above response:

1. PhD holders have valuable insight into the research cycle and bring in their experience to research management.
2. PhD holders might be better trusted by researchers/ students/ PI's because of their experience of the research cycle and hence are an ideal fit for Research Management roles.



The above responses illustrate the professional experiences of the respondents. The pie chart on the left shows that 65% of the respondents were involved in a Research related role prior to joining as a Research Management professional. *For ease of representation, respondents identifying as Researchers, Postdoctoral Fellows, Research Fellows, Research Assistants and PhD graduates have been merged under the Research role category.*

As far as the respondents' experience levels in Research support roles are concerned, we find that the majority of respondents lie within the early-stage career category. The survey set also includes experienced professionals who have been involved in these roles for more than 10 years, which provides a broader spectrum of respondents who have seen the Research Management ecosystem grow.



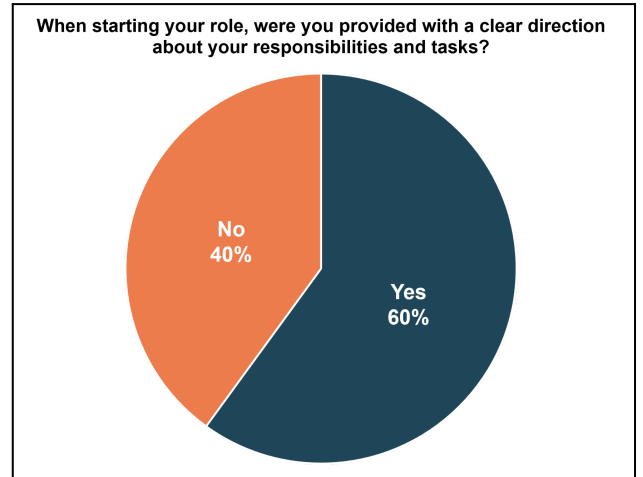
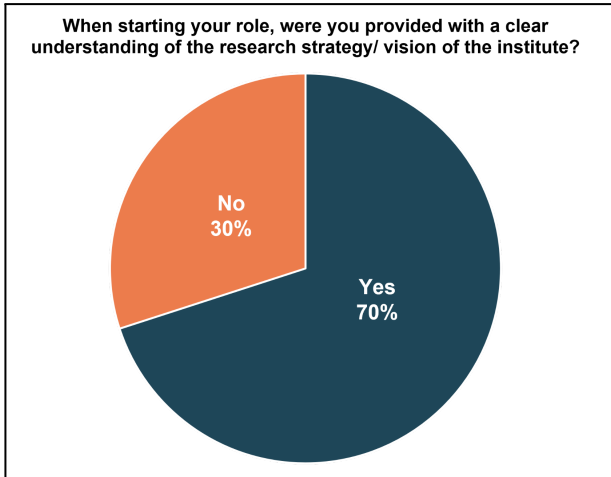
The graph on the left offers justification for the low number of respondents to the survey owing to an overall low number of Research Management professionals in the country.

As per the result, respondents know only a maximum of 50 other professionals working in Research Management roles (assuming even 1 respondent knows 50 others). A vast majority have only come across 20 or fewer other such professionals.

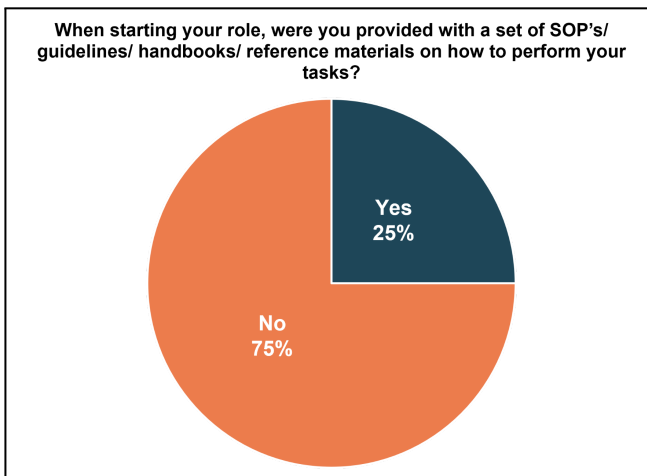
The limited number of professionals can have implications for the development and effectiveness of the Research Management field in India, as it may limit opportunities for growth and hinder the development of best practices.

Section 2: Professional support received by respondents

This section focuses on institutional support for Research Management professionals prior to starting their roles and during their tenure.



The above figures represent the dissemination of the research strategy and roles and responsibilities envisioned for Research Management professionals. While the vast majority of respondents were provided with a clear set of responsibilities and even an understanding of the institutes' research agenda, not all respondents were able to affirm the same.



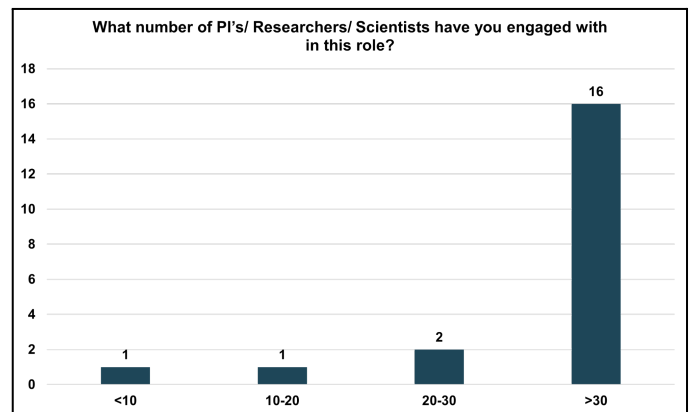
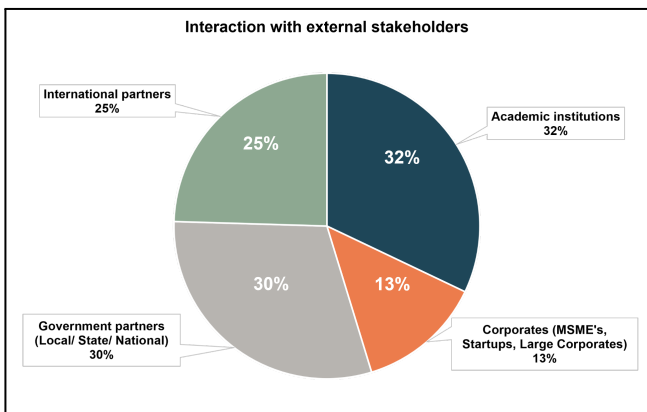
A contrasting opinion came to light when respondents were asked about the support they received for performing their roles. 75% of the respondents reported that they did not receive any guidelines/ handbooks/ SOPs or reference materials on performing the tasks expected of them. Furthermore, 65% said they did not receive any training before beginning their roles.

Inferences from the above responses:

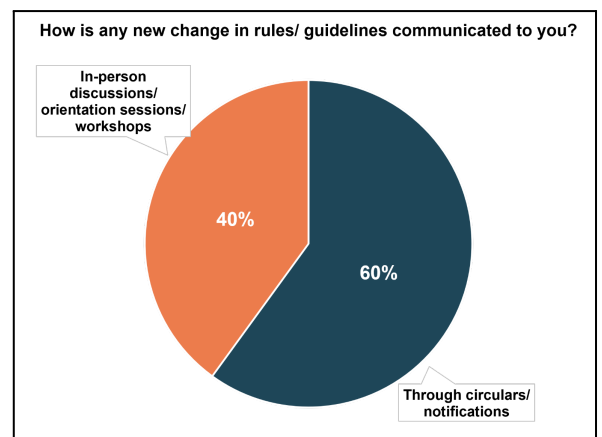
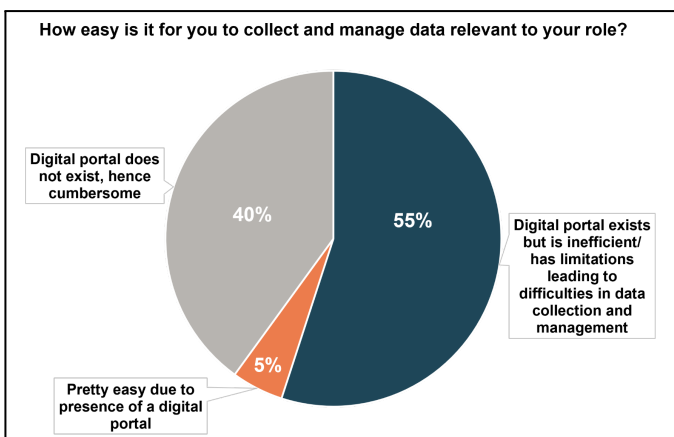
1. Institutions lack the necessary resources to train/ support Research Management professionals.
2. Institutions are not clear on how to best utilise Research Management professionals.
3. Institutions should build a clear vision and strategy for research. Roles and responsibilities for Research Management professionals must also be clearly defined.
4. Lack of available resources such as SOPs/ handbooks, guidelines, and reference materials for new Research Management professionals.
5. There exists an opportunity to build resources to support institutions and Research Management professionals so as to benefit the research ecosystem.

Section 3: Respondents' work ecosystems

This section explores the respondents' interactions with internal and external stakeholders as well as the resources available for data collection and change management.



The illustrations above show the working ecosystem of Research Management professionals both internally and externally. Based on the responses, they work with a diverse set of external stakeholders, including Government partners, other Academic institutions, Corporates and even International partners. Internally, the majority of the respondents reported working with more than 30 PI's/ Researchers/ Scientists in their role.

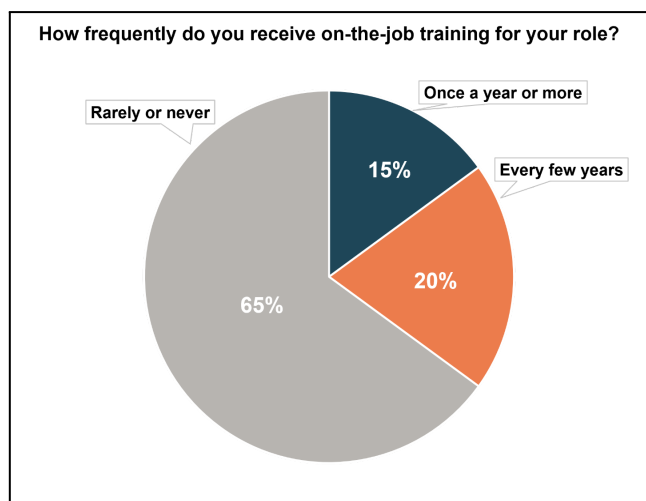


Responses illustrated above indicate that while regularly working and interacting with a multitude of stakeholders, the respondents seem to be struggling with data collection and change management. On the data management front, 55% of the respondents reported that while their workplace possesses a digital portal (data management software), it is inefficient/ has limitations. 40% reported the absence of a digital portal altogether.

Change management seems to present another issue, with 60% of the respondents stating that they received information such as changes in guidelines/ updates through circulars/ notifications. Effective change management includes planning, communication and interaction with stakeholders on a regular and more hands-on basis.

Inferences from the above responses:

1. Data collection and management remain a serious concern irrespective of institution status (government or private).
2. Many digital tools currently exist, but there is a lack of awareness and knowledge on how to use them to the best of their ability.
3. Identification of processes for data collection and change management are relatively easy to fix.



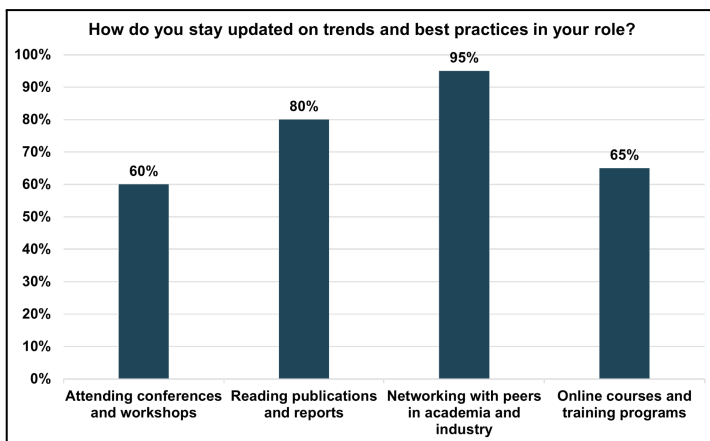
In response to the question of receiving on-the-job training for their role, 65% of the respondents stated they rarely or never receive any.

This response again points towards a lack of resources available for continuously upskilling the Research Management professionals.

Of the few respondents who did undergo training, most reported receiving research methodologies training and soft skills training.

Section 4: Professional development of respondents

This section of the survey highlights findings related to the professional development and career progression of Research Management professionals.



The previous section concluded with the majority of respondents stating that they had rarely or never received any on-the-job training. When asked if they would like to receive training for their role, most of the respondents replied in the affirmative, but remarkably, 50% stated that they would only want training if it was relevant and useful. A separate question on the benefit of training for Research Management roles was met with the following responses.

How do you think training has helped you in your role?

Respondent A: *Most training run by organization is poor quality; Not helpful; Perpetuates mediocrity.*

Respondent B: *Trainings are of less use and lack focus.*

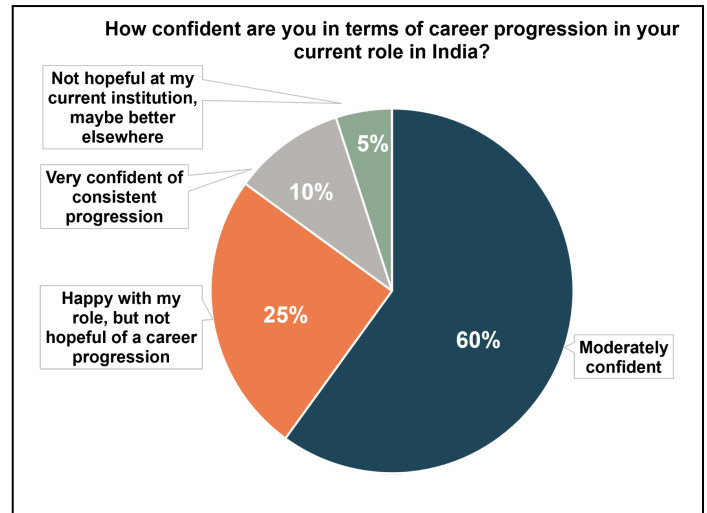
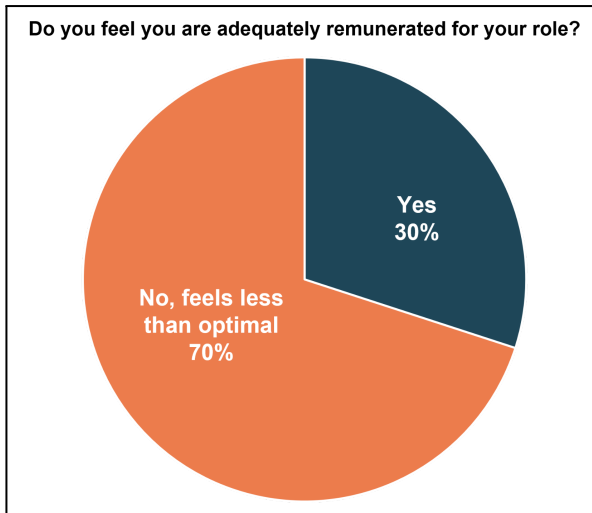
Respondent C: *I try to stay current through reading and through online workshops even though there is no well-defined mechanism for official training.*

Respondent D: *Whatever training I could get through my networks, has helped me in improving my skillsets and strengthening network.*

Respondent E: *There has been no real training.*

Respondent F: *I have received no training in my role.*

Although these responses were obtained from a small proportion of respondents, they corroborate the claim that training needs to be relevant and useful. Furthermore, when asked how they keep up with trends and best practices in their field, most respondents cited networking with peers as their preferred method. While networking is undoubtedly helpful, it should be supplemented by beneficial and applicable training to achieve the best possible outcomes.



Arguably one of the most apparent indications highlighting the difficulties faced by Research Management professionals was uncovered when survey respondents were asked about their contentment with salaries and opportunities for career advancement. 70% of the respondents felt they were not adequately remunerated for their roles. 60% of the respondents reported only being Moderately confident of career progression in India, and 25% even stated that while they were happy with their roles, they weren't hopeful of a career progression.

Inferences from the above responses:

1. Effective and regular training for Research Management professionals is the need of the hour.
2. Competitive compensation and clear career growth trajectories are needed in this field, just like any other.



Section 5: Improving the Research Management ecosystem

The last section of the survey provided the respondents with the opportunity to present their opinions on improving the research management ecosystem in their institutions and in India. The respondents were given the freedom to record their responses without any word-count limitations, and the results revealed many consistencies among different respondents.

The responses were analysed to identify common themes and trends and are listed below:

1. Establish and formalise the Research Management ecosystem.
2. Employ skilled and experienced personnel in Research Management roles.
3. Identify and/or create relevant and useful training materials for Research Management professionals.
4. Create policies for the career progression of Research Management professionals.
5. Advocate for higher remunerations for Research Management roles.

6. Have well-defined roles and responsibilities, SOPs and Job Descriptions for Research Management professionals.
7. Institutions should have an established research strategy and vision.
8. Recognition of services provided by Research Management professionals is necessary.

We take a look at some of the responses in detail below:

In your opinion, what steps could be taken to improve the research ecosystem in Indian academic/ research institutes?

Respondent G:

1. *Create similar rungs for research administrators so that growth is vertical*
2. *Please revise salary scales. Most Grant offices pay a pittance to the Grant managers and officers and may not always provide an increment based on inflation.*
3. *Allow time for adequate training of the personnel.*
4. *Important to have a clear cut job description. Unfortunately a grant manager or facilitators within an RDO office end up being "Jack of all trades but master of few"*
5. *Grants offices need a vision and a lot of it depends on who is heading this. The vision should be something that is stable across the years and not change with the whims of the person heading it. What can change are the processes and over time it is important to streamline responsibilities.*

In your opinion, what steps could be taken to improve the research ecosystem in Indian academic/ research institutes?

Respondent H:

1. *Create regular positions comparable to industry standard in salary and perks for research managers as these are skilled HR.*
2. *Create stepwise career progression policy which is in alignment with industry and funding body.*
3. *Make provision for regular training (like faculty gets CPDA, research managers should also have yearly provision for these training as un-skilling and skilling are constantly required for this role.*
4. *A society of Research Managers creation would help.*
5. *Annual Meet of Research Managers.*
6. *More funding for Research managers to fill the gap in the country research management capabilities.*

In your opinion, what steps could be taken to improve the research ecosystem in Indian academic/ research institutes?

Respondent I:

Recognize the value addition being provided by the services of research administrators. Formulate policies for career progression of the research administrators

How do you think your research/academic institution could improve support for research activities?

Respondent J:

Research support services increases the protected time available for researcher to conduct research, write papers, and mentor students - these are activities that researchers do best. So we need research managers/administrators (RMAs) to take care of administrative aspects, stakeholder management, and developing resources to benefit the researchers. At the institution level, RMAs can be a part of the decision making bodies by providing insights of the global and regional research and funding landscape, building and maintaining networks with key stakeholders in the Government, in the Industry, identifying research capacity needs, etc. At the leadership level, both RMAs and researchers play complementary roles.

 **Conclusion**

Findings from the survey have shed light on some interesting data that lead us to believe that Research Management as a profession has still not evolved in India as it should have. The low number of professionals working in this field is an immediate indicator but only a precursor to the various challenges these professionals face in the Indian research ecosystem. Overall, the survey results provide insights into the current state of Research Management professionals in India and highlight the need for institutional support and resources to help them effectively manage research activities.

The profession of Research Management is still in its early stages in India, and it requires ample support and training for its ecosystem to flourish. According to the respondents, there are clear indications of the changes they would like to see, such as formalization of the profession, clarification of roles and responsibilities, and access to relevant training and professional development opportunities.

The survey highlights the need for collaboration among the main stakeholders - the Government, Institutes, and Research Management professionals - to facilitate the growth of this profession, which is crucial for the research ecosystem. In its upcoming papers, FAST India aims to tackle the issues identified in the survey by providing guidelines for establishing and operating Research Management functions at academic/research institutions in India.