From the beginning of the pandemic and the ensuing budget shortfalls, Rutgers Global not only strictly followed the university guidelines by prudently monitoring all expenses, but also mobilized and repurposed all staff to support urgent and critical initiatives, such as Rutgers Overseas Semester Experience (ROSE) program and Study Abroad @ Home.

Due to the pandemic, converting student programs from in-person into online also offered us a great cost-saving opportunity. Hosting the Fall Study Abroad Fair and New International Student Orientation virtually saved about $12,000 and $100,000 respectively.

Given that travels are still limited under the pandemic, we expect that most of the student programs will be offered virtually, which will save us a significant amount of programming costs. Also, professional development costs may be much lower than usual since most conferences are offered virtually.

Given the hiring freeze and budget cuts, Rutgers Global staff have adapted quickly to deliver quality services remotely. We communicate changes rapidly and transparently to get more buy-in from staff of all levels, but still find it challenging to creatively motivate staff and help maintain their wellbeing. It is vital to communicate the big picture to all staff so that the urgency and necessity of cost-saving becomes a shared responsibility across the unit to ensure the university can get through these unprecedented and challenging times.

BEN FAN
Director, Budgets and Personnel
Rutgers Global
A great benefit of working with student organizations is the ability to teach fiscal responsibility and good financial stewardship to an ever-revolving door of student government leaders. One method we routinely employ in Camden Student Affairs and pass on to our student government leaders is known as the "informal bid process."

When searching for providers of goods and services to support student programs and activities, our administrators and student leaders are asked to seek price quotes from at least three to five different providers that can deliver the same service. We often require that they select the vendor with the lowest price, unless quality and/or project timing are a consideration.

Since our students primarily focus on their studies while supplementing their academics through participation in student activities and programs, we realize that students planning far in advance is rare. Unfortunately, due to this culture, the student services environment is equipped to process purchases in an emergency manner. However, as we always train and explain to students each semester, the further we get out in front of a purchase, the better the planning for cost savings.

The greatest challenges with most business process changes are clear and concise communication of the new processes and obtaining the proper "buy-in" from all the relevant stakeholders in the process. When it is necessary to adjust a process, it’s always most helpful when the stakeholders know and understand why the process has been altered. This allows us to fully comprehend the bottlenecks and problems inherent in the old process that should lead to the benefits and efficiencies gained with the new process. This helps lead to improved compliance when introducing a new process or policy.

Another challenge we’ve seen is that many university managers and administrators are not familiar with procurement and finance jargon. We make sure to spell out accounting and procurement language in plain terms, and provide real life examples of situations and analogies that make the jargon palatable to the non-financial community.

TOM SNYDER  
Business Manager  
Division of Student Affairs - Camden Campus
During the summer, External Affairs implemented a new step in the purchasing process that would not significantly impact the time-to-purchase. Staff are now expected to provide a brief justification for their purchases, in addition to the required supporting documents, to determine whether the purchase was necessary and reasonable to support the department’s core mission and operations; and whether the purchase is being procured at the lowest cost. The justifications must receive approval from our division leaders, so their support is critical.

While it is difficult to pinpoint the number of cost saving changes External Affairs has and will make in the coming months, the commitment shown by the department as a whole has resulted in existing agreements for core goods and services being negotiated or re-negotiated as the case dictates. This has helped us fine tune our needs and redirect resources that maximize the benefit to the university. This has also helped our department weather the more recent budget cuts.

There are always challenges when implementing process changes. However, in many cases, those challenges can be overcome to a certain extent by providing staff with the context necessary to support the changes. The purchasing process and requirements at Rutgers are complex and adding any additional steps at a time when changes are a regular occurrence are difficult. However, I periodically meet with all department preparer’s to review important changes and updates, which has helped to provide them with context and specific details regarding the changes. In addition, I have planned to conduct virtual sessions for our staff to ensure they are aware of the changes and how it affects their role in the purchasing process.

My advice for other units is that training on the local level is important. Identifying key stakeholder groups and delivering them the information they need is important. While it’s difficult to find time to train key personnel, especially if different groups have different needs, it’s important to make sure all stakeholders have the information and context they need to avoid frustration and limit issues and mistakes.

TODD SLAWSKY
Business Manager
University Communications and Marketing
The COVID-19 pandemic forced us not only to think more carefully about how we spend our limited resources to keep the School of Arts and Sciences (SAS) running in support of our educational and research mission, but also how we actually perform our duties day-to-day. With regard to how we do our work, the pandemic has afforded us the opportunity to break our reliance on paper in ways that all the previous cost-containment initiatives and pushes for increased sustainability haven’t. Most of us are not back on campus yet and, unless we have printers of our own at home, we’ve had to learn to do without. I, for one, had a pretty significant paper habit and was very set in my ways. It took me awhile to get used to working exclusively with electronic documents, but if this old dog can do it, so can everyone else.

Thus an obvious target of cost savings was our lease on the majority of the 95 copiers we have across SAS was coming to an end. The data from recent months shows a significant decrease in the number of copies we are making – even with our return to research activities on the rise – and we have developed a plan to replace nearly all of these copiers with small, multi-function, networked printers for the short-term, and only lease new copiers after we analyze the need upon a full return to campus. We estimate the cost savings when we make the change in the coming weeks to be at least $20,000 a month and we are aiming to eventually replace significantly fewer copiers then we had – and downsize the units we put back in most cases as well.

It wasn’t a hard sell for this phase as few areas are using their copiers much, and the hope is that by offering more cost-effective and eco-friendly options in the months ahead we can reduce the overall expenditure on copiers (and also toner and paper) as well as our carbon footprint.