

The TEAM Initiative: Tufts Effectiveness in Administrative Management

September 2014

Common Questions Answered: Tufts Support Services (TSS)

Updated: September 5, 2014

What is Tufts Support Services?

Tufts Support Services (TSS) will be a new organization within Tufts University that will support an improved model for delivering services to Tufts faculty, staff and student-employees. Under the TSS model, Tufts will consolidate resources and provide a simple, service-oriented approach to conducting many of the administrative human resources (HR) and finance tasks currently carried out by many different groups within the university.

The development and launch of TSS is one of many initiatives within the Tufts Effectiveness in Administrative Management (TEAM) Program, a university-wide project designed to ensure that our administration supports Tufts' core academic mission while also serving as a responsible steward of the resources entrusted to us. Please visit the [TEAM website](#) for more information about this program.

When will TSS launch? Will it launch all at once or in phases?

TSS will launch in mid-December 2014 and will provide HR and finance-related services. TSS will begin providing all these services at once, not in phases.

How long will the entire implementation process take?

Based on recommendations from the TEAM Program, the detailed design for TSS began in May 2013. In mid-June 2014, the official TSS implementation kick-off took place, which is the current phase of the TSS project.

Why are we implementing TSS?

The [Tufts: The Next 10 Years \(T10\)](#) strategic plan identified several opportunities for Tufts to reimagine the way in which work is organized and services are delivered to faculty, staff and students. TSS also builds on Tufts' tradition of managing resources carefully to maintain our financial strength and complements feedback received through our Excellence at Work survey, in which many employees told us that we should reduce red tape and streamline administrative processes. TSS reflects these recommendations and strives to position administrative work

within the university where it can be best accomplished, while reducing duplicative, complicated and sometimes outdated processes and technology.

How does this support Tufts' core mission?

Last year, we identified many duplicative efforts being performed across the university. Every dollar spent on duplicative administrative functions and services at Tufts is a dollar that has been subtracted from our core mission of teaching, research and public service. By bringing routine work that is currently performed across schools and divisions into a specialized unit, such as TSS, the university can provide consistently high-quality service, improve accuracy, minimize the duplication of effort and reduce costs. As a result, Tufts' faculty and staff will be able to focus more time and resources on other work that supports their core missions.

To provide just one example, last year we conducted a study of the number of calls that Human Resources employees receive. We discovered that HR receives almost 4,000 inquiries a month, mostly general questions that could be managed by a specialized group of employees, well versed in HR policy and procedure. Providing this service within TSS will allow central HR employees to focus on more complex issues requiring timely consideration and response, such as complex benefits matters, hiring decisions and employee relations.

While administrative staff make vital contributions to Tufts, it is important that we streamline business processes to provide those services as efficiently as possible. Metrics will be put in place to ensure that TSS provides high-quality, timely service to Tufts employees.

Will this save Tufts money? How much and how soon?

Yes. Saving Tufts money is one of many goals of TSS implementation. Given external pressures to lower tuition, adhere to increased compliance requirements and compensate for diminishing state and Federal research funds, we must find ways to reduce duplicative work in order to lower our overall operating costs. This is a challenge faced across higher education.

TSS implementation is intended to create savings over time. While it would be premature to project exact numbers, we believe TSS and other TEAM initiatives will help reverse the trends of expenses exceeding revenue.

We expect to realize the full value of TSS after TSS has been fully implemented and our schools and divisions are taking advantage of the new operating model.

What administrative services will TSS provide?

TSS will answer questions about and provide direct support for many human resources (HR) and finance-related administrative services to Tufts faculty, staff, student-employees and prospective employees.

When it launches in mid-December, TSS will provide the following services:

Employee Data Administration:

- Processing of employee personal and work data changes, such as name changes and promotion-related data updates
- Collecting and processing time and attendance data
- Producing and distributing payroll
- Providing payroll-related reporting, auditing and compliance
- Responding to general inquiries regarding leaves, including the referral of more complex leave inquiries to central HR
- Updating employee leave status and making corresponding payroll and benefits changes
- Tracking and reporting leave balances and accruals

Benefits Administration:

- Responding to common employee inquiries about benefits; complex benefits inquiries will be referred to the Tufts Human Resources division (central HR)
- Receiving and processing qualified status changes

Recruiting and Transitioning Prospective Employees:

- Processing and verifying I-9 paperwork for all new hires, including student-employees
- Responding to applicant inquiries; complex inquiries will be referred to central HR

Procurement for Most* High-Volume, Low-Dollar Amount Purchases:

- Assisting with business inquiries related to procurement policies, procedures and technology
- Conducting data entry and compliance related to new vendor set-up
- Collecting and organizing procurement support documentation and requests
- Answering vendor inquiries
- Reviewing purchases for available contracts and/or discounts
- Processing purchase orders under certain thresholds
- Routing requisitions that need additional review to Tufts central Purchasing division

** Purchases that require significant review and approval (for example, high-dollar amount purchases and some scientific lab materials with additional compliance requirements) will continue to be handled via existing central Finance processes.*

Accounting Transactions:

- Assisting with business inquiries involving accounting policies and procedures
- Conducting data entry and uploading of financial journal entries
- Providing support for creating interdepartmental requisitions (IDRs) when self-service is not available
- Processing IDR orders for completion

Travel Arrangements and Business Expenses:

- Answering client inquiries related to travel and business expense process, policy and reports
- Providing travel booking assistance
- Working with travelers to collect all necessary documentation and information to complete expense reports
- Helping to prepare travel and expense forms for reimbursement
- Reviewing expenditures for compliance with university policies
- Processing expense reports and payments
- Serving as a liaison with accounts payable to assist in recovering personal/unallowable employee expenses

Moving forward, we will work with the Tufts community to help them understand clearly what tasks will be moving to TSS and will no longer be performed by staff.

What administrative services will continue to be provided by the schools and divisions?

In general, schools and divisions will continue to execute strategic HR and finance-related processes and processes that involve mid-to-high level approval(s) within the organization.

All school and division leaders will work with their HR business partners (HRBPs) and the TEAM Program workforce transition team to eliminate duplicative processes that will move to TSS. They will also work collaboratively to continue to provide the direct services that need to remain with staff in the schools and divisions.

For example, TSS staff will answer basic applicant inquiries, such as application submission and status, while all other recruitment and hiring functions will continue to be handled by Tufts HR

staff, according to the existing policies and procedures outlined by [HR](#) and the [Office of Equal Opportunity](#).

The tasks described earlier under “What administrative services will TSS provide?” will no longer be done in the schools or divisions when TSS is open.

Will TSS be able to handle unique or complex needs and requests?

TSS staff will be knowledgeable about university policies and procedures and will be trained to handle an extensive array of scenarios. However, we understand that Tufts community members may have unique or complex needs and requests. TSS staff will maintain close relationships with HR and Finance staff who work across all three campuses and will know to refer those issues that cannot be immediately addressed by a TSS staff member.

How will I access TSS services?

TSS will have a physical presence on the Boston, Grafton and Medford/Somerville campuses. Individuals may contact TSS via the TSS website, email, phone, fax, US postal service or walk-in to the physical location, should they desire in-person assistance.

The Medford/Somerville TSS center will be located at 62 Rear Talbot Avenue in the building previously used to support the Student Information System (iSIS) team. We are working to identify locations on the Boston and Grafton campuses.

While we have not finalized all TSS operational policies, we expect that the TSS centers will be open initially Monday through Friday, from 8:00 a.m. to 6:00 p.m., making it easier for faculty, staff and student-employees to have issues resolved in a timely manner. Meanwhile, the TSS website will provide 24/7 resources to answer many basic questions and facilitate service requests. The Tufts community can expect TSS to handle these services consistently, accurately and efficiently.

Anyone who makes an inquiry or service request through TSS will be given a reference number and a process for tracking the status of that question.

How will students interact with TSS?

TSS will provide student-employees with basic HR support related to their campus positions, such as processing and validating Federal I-9 forms. Student organizations in need of procurement support for low-dollar, high-volume purchases will utilize TSS. Student organizations will continue to work with central Finance and follow existing policies and

procedures for budget support. Tufts students will continue to receive student-focused, non-HR and finance-related services through existing channels (for example, student registration will continue to be provided through iSIS).

How will benefits questions be handled?

TSS staff will be able to address most benefits-related needs, such as enrollment, policy questions and dependent verification. In instances where employees have unique or complex needs, TSS staff will connect them to the appropriate HR specialist or to the benefits provider for resolution.

How will recruitment and hiring be handled?

TSS staff will answer basic applicant inquiries, such as application submission and status, while all other recruitment and hiring functions will continue to be handled by Tufts HR staff, according to the existing policies and procedures outlined by [HR](#) and the [Office of Equal Opportunity](#).

How will bills be paid?

TSS staff will process all accounts payable activities, including invoices, payments and electronic funds transfers and will work closely with central Finance or other divisions on any cases that require policy clarification.

How will TSS be structured?

TSS will be an operating division of the Office of the Executive Vice President and will be led by Senior Director of TSS Dick Doolin. Dick has worked at Tufts for more than 32 years in a number of finance positions, most recently as the director of financial services. His experience at the university covers a broad range of activities that will be supported by TSS. Within TSS, there will be three departments, each focused on a unique set of client service, HR and finance tasks. Each group will be overseen by a director and will employ varying levels of support staff.

Will any current central HR and Finance positions be eliminated?

Yes, some positions within the current HR and Finance organizations will be eliminated in order to reduce the duplication of work and to ensure that central HR and Finance are staffed at the appropriate levels after some work has been integrated into the TSS organization.

As always, internal employees will be eligible and encouraged to apply for positions within TSS or across Tufts University. The primary goal in staffing TSS will be to retain as many knowledgeable and qualified Tufts employees as possible to ensure that TSS employees are highly skilled and well versed in university culture, policies and procedures.

How many positions will be eliminated? Will these positions be eliminated from central HR and Finance and/or from other divisions?

We don't yet know how many positions will be eliminated. Wherever possible, Tufts intends to minimize involuntary job loss through managed attrition (the process of not filling voluntarily vacated positions that are no longer needed), re-training personnel and realigning responsibilities. HR business partners (HRBPs) will work closely with Tufts' leaders to identify activities currently being performed within their division that will transition to TSS. The number of affected positions will be different for each division. Once we know this, division and department leaders will communicate with individuals and teams as quickly, clearly and respectfully as possible.

How will TSS be staffed? Will new TSS positions be open to both internal and external candidates?

We anticipate that a total of 40 full-time and seven temporary TSS staff positions will be posted in early September and that TSS will be staffed prior to the mid-December launch. Future staffing levels will be determined based on volume of work and need for additional services.

All new positions will be posted on the [Work@Tufts](#) website and will be open for internal consideration. Some positions will also be posted externally. Hiring practices for TSS roles are governed by existing Tufts [HR employment policies and procedures](#). The primary goal in staffing TSS will be to retain as many knowledgeable and qualified Tufts employees as possible to ensure that TSS employees are highly skilled and well versed in university culture, policies and procedures.

TSS will utilize temporary positions to ensure there is enough coverage to meet client demands and expectations during its initial launch. We anticipate that there will be a critical need during the launch phase that is expected to level off over six months as TSS establishes itself as part of "doing business" at Tufts. The HRBP and the TSS senior director will review each temporary position before its contract end date to determine if the position should be eliminated, extended or transitioned to another role. Current employees can also apply for these temporary roles, understanding that there are different employment terms.

What will be the process for selecting candidates to fill TSS positions?

All TSS positions will be posted in early September on the [Work@Tufts](#) website and will be filled according to Tufts' existing HR policies and procedures. HR will work closely with TSS hiring managers and the Office of Equal Opportunity to ensure all [ADA requirements](#) for reasonable accommodation have been met during the hiring process.

Why must current employees who are affected by the integration of work into TSS apply for TSS positions?

TSS is a new organization and TSS positions have new and/or additional responsibilities. The new positions will be posted on the [Work@Tufts](#) website in accordance with Tufts' existing [HR policies and procedures](#). By posting and interviewing for TSS positions, Tufts can ensure qualified candidates are placed in positions that best align with their skills.

Why are additional, temporary positions for TSS being created? When will they be hired? How long will they be in place? Will individuals affected by position elimination be eligible for these positions?

In order to deliver on Tufts' commitment to maintaining high-quality service while reducing operating costs, TSS will utilize temporary positions to ensure there is enough coverage to meet client demands and expectations during its initial launch. We anticipate that there will be a critical need during the launch phase that is expected to level off over six months as TSS establishes itself as part of "doing business" at Tufts. As a result, initial contracts for TSS temporary positions will last six months. The HRBP and the TSS senior director will review each temporary position before its end date to determine if the position should be eliminated, extended or transitioned to another role. Temporary positions will be posted along with the regular, benefit-eligible positions. Current employees can also apply for these temporary roles, understanding that there are different employment terms.

What will happen to staff at the school level and in other central divisions who now spend only a portion of their time handling services that will be transferred to TSS? Will their positions be eliminated or reduced? If so, when will these individuals be notified?

Effect on Tufts staff will vary by function, position and location. Tufts school, division and department leaders will work closely with the appropriate HRBPs for their areas to determine how best to manage each situation. Leaders will determine on a case-by-case basis whether the time previously spent on these tasks should be reallocated to other activities or whether positions should be reduced or eliminated.

A position is defined as reduced when the hours an employee is expected to work have decreased. Positions will be reduced when there are no other responsibilities that can be reallocated to the position to justify the same number of hours.

A position may be eliminated if it has been deemed no longer critical to the operation of the university. Positions may be eliminated if a majority or all responsibilities previously performed are now being performed by TSS. Wherever possible, we will minimize involuntary job loss through managed attrition (the process of not filling voluntarily vacated positions that are no longer needed), re-training personnel and realigning responsibilities.

We are committed to making every effort to notify affected employees as soon as information about specific jobs is available. However, because we are using a case-by-case approach and taking the time to make thoughtful decisions, we do not have a definitive timeline for when this information will be available. We encourage all employees concerned about position reduction or position elimination to contact their supervisor or their HRBP to discuss opportunities with TSS.