



## **SPONSORED PROGRAMS ADMINISTRATION**

1901 S. First St., Suite A, MC-685  
Champaign, IL 61820-7406

RE: SPaRC Outstanding Service Award Nomination for Alison Morgan

Dear 2025 SPaRC Retreat Committee:

It is with great enthusiasm that I nominate Alison Morgan, Senior Associate Director, Award Management with Sponsored Programs Administration (SPA), for the SPaRC Outstanding Service Award. With over fifteen years of dedicated service in the field of research administration at the University of Illinois, Alison exemplifies the leadership, expertise, and commitment that this award seeks to honor.

As head of SPA's Non-Federal Award Management team, Alison has consistently demonstrated excellence in her work. She leads daily operations with precision, anticipates resource needs, and drives meaningful process improvements that enhance efficiency and elevate service quality. Her commitment to staff success is evident through structured onboarding, performance coaching, and succession planning—creating an environment of continuous growth and engagement.

Widely respected across campus, Alison is a trusted advisor to business offices and research administrators. Under her direction, principal investigators and departments receive professional, timely support even under demanding conditions. Her commitment to fostering an inclusive and respectful workplace has strengthened collaboration not only within SPA, but also across the wider research administration community, as well as in units such as UAFR and University Payables—where her leadership has helped build trust, streamline communication, and promote shared success.

Alison generously shares her knowledge with other research administrators by regularly presenting in SPaRC'Ed and SPaRC Spotlight sessions and lending her voice to national conversations through NCURA publications and conferences.

Innovative and solutions-driven, Alison regularly seeks new ways to improve award management operations and continues to push us into the future—from implementing e-solutions to refining unit testing strategies and exploring emerging tools. Her dependability, professionalism, and ability to thrive under pressure make her an exceptional nominee for this recognition.

Alison's contributions to research administration at Illinois are far-reaching. She inspires trust, drives innovation, and elevates the SPA mission through her leadership, mentorship, and forward-thinking efforts. For these reasons, I highly recommend Alison for the SPaRC Outstanding Service Award.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink that reads 'Karen E. Thomas'.

Karen E. Thomas  
Director, Post-Award  
Sponsored Programs Administration



June 3, 2025

**To:** 2025 SPaRC Awards Committee

**From:** John Laroe

**Re:** Alison Morgan Nomination Letter

I am writing a letter of nomination to support Alison Morgan's nomination for the 2025 SPaRC Outstanding Service Award.

I work in University Accounting and Financial Reporting (UAFR), and while my responsibilities don't directly relate to sponsored projects and grant accounting, there are various times where we are working on projects, customer questions, or year-end audit schedules which cross over into areas that require expertise from the grant fund subject matter experts. When this occurs, we must reach out to our contacts within SPA for help and guidance.

Over the years, I've encountered numerous scenarios like this, and honestly, Alison has always been my first contact that I reach out to for guidance. Many times, Alison can directly answer my question and/or help the unit with their question. Other times, she may re-direct me to the correct person in another area of SPA that can assist. I know that every time I reach out to Alison, I will receive prompt, professional, and courteous customer service!

Alison also recently played a big part in a very helpful presentation that SPA delivered to UAFR as a part of our in-house professional development series that we offer to our staff. Alison helped put together a great presentation and provided a lot of real-life examples of the various issues that SPA deals with on a day-to-day basis. This presentation was one of our most highly rated events of the year, and our staff loved it. I know that Alison's contributions to this presentation were a big reason for its success!

We also had a recent project within UAFR that one of my staff members (Anne Larimore) was leading. It related to the termination of an outdated and incorrect program code that was being used for postdoctoral fellowships. Through our research with the staff members at the National Association of College and University Business Officers (NACUBO), we determined what the proper set of program codes and NACUBO functions should be, and we worked closely with Alison and her team to make the necessary corrections on various grant funds which accounted for postdoctoral fellowships. Alison was extremely helpful, courteous, and professional throughout this process, and we couldn't have completed the project without her help!

**OFFICE OF THE ASSOCIATE VICE PRESIDENT, CONTROLLER & DEPUTY  
COMPTROLLER**

UNIVERSITY OF ILLINOIS SYSTEM

1817 South Neil St, Illini Plaza Bldg, Suite 202, MC 660 Champaign, IL 68120  
217-244-3698

Finally, one last note that I'd like to mention relates to Alison's leadership abilities and her skill in developing her staff. One of my staff members (Anne Larimore) has told me numerous times how helpful Alison's staff have been to work with (e.g., Michelle Ward). I know that Alison's leadership abilities, dedication to customer service, and the tone that she sets for her staff are probably a big reason that she has such a strong staff that reports to her. I greatly appreciate when leaders in other units take the time and attention to develop such a strong staff within their team as Alison does, as this helps create even more strong team members that we can all rely upon when issues and questions arise.

Thank you for your time in reading this nomination letter. I'm sure there are dozens of other examples that I'm not currently thinking of which would demonstrate Alison's customer service and dedication to the University of Illinois System and its research efforts. But regardless, I would just like to commend Alison for the high quality of work and service that she provides to the system, and I personally thank you for considering her for this prestigious award!

John Laroe  
Associate Controller  
University of Illinois Accounting & Financial Reporting (UAFR)  
[jmlaroe@uillinois.edu](mailto:jmlaroe@uillinois.edu)  
(217) 333-9133

**OFFICE FOR UNIVERSITY RELATIONS**

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CHICAGO 1737 West Polk Street, MC 971 • Chicago, IL 60612 • (312) 996-3772 • Fax (312) 996-1836

Dear 2025 SPaRC Selection Committee,

I am writing to enthusiastically nominate Alison Morgan for the SPaRC Outstanding Service Award.

It has been a pleasure to work with Alison since she started as a Grants & Contracts Specialist in 2010, back when SPA was known as GCO (Grants and Contracts Office). From the beginning, it was clear she was an exceptional professional. It came as no surprise when Alison quickly advanced to the role of Assistant Director of Private Awards in 2013 and again in 2018 to the Associate Director of Non-Federal awards.

Alison takes her responsibilities as a Senior Associate Director at SPA very seriously and she excels in every aspect of this role. She brings a strong work ethic and an unwavering dedication to ensuring that the many facets of her job are handled expertly, seamlessly, and with great compassion. Her calm, level-headed demeanor and exemplary professionalism ensure that even the most stressful deadlines are met with grace and confidence. She sets the tone for a solution-focused and respectful work environment that brings out the best in the SPA team.

Alison is not only a leader within SPA, but is also a valued resource across the broader research administration community. Her communication skills are exceptional. When Alison reaches out for input, she has typically already researched the issue thoroughly and has anticipated the answers, often requiring little more than a second set of eyes. Her initiative and insight are remarkable.

She is also a champion for continuous improvement. Alison led the major overhaul of the outdated Section 16 policies and procedures. This was a massive undertaking that she approached with wisdom, clarity, and a healthy dose of humor when the going got tough. Thanks to her leadership, the confusing and terribly outdated content was successfully transitioned to streamlined, user-friendly research topics on the SPA website. This was a major accomplishment and a lasting contribution to the University. She should be very proud of leading this successful effort.

Alison leads by example, consistently demonstrating integrity, humility, respect and kindness (and a lot of other great things – I could go on and on). One of Alison's greatest strengths is her genuine concern for the well-being and professional development of SPA staff. She contributes meaningfully to another working group focused on personnel management, and her thoughtful and considerate suggestions help make SPA a more supportive, collaborative, productive, and motivating place to work.

Beyond her contributions to SPA, Alison has extended her impact nationally. She has shared her expertise through presentations at NCURA, showcasing her excellence and elevating the University of Illinois as a leader in sponsored programs administration.

I highly recommend Alison for the SPaRC Outstanding Service Award. Her outstanding service extends far beyond what's been mentioned above, there are too many contributions to describe in full. She is a true ambassador for Sponsored Programs Administration at the University of Illinois and is richly deserving of this honor.

Thank you,

*Jayne Goby*

Jayne Goby, CPA  
Sr. Associate Director  
Sponsored Programs Administration  
University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign  
Office of the Vice Chancellor for Research and Innovation

July 25, 2025

RE: SPARC Outstanding Service Award

Dear SPARC Awards Committee,

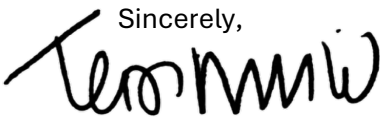
Thank you for the opportunity to write a letter of support for the nomination of Alison Morgan as the recipient of the Outstanding Service Award this year. As noted on the website, the award should be presented to an individual who has demonstrated outstanding service in support of research administration at Illinois. Having worked with Alison for the past 10 years on various complicated and tedious projects for Grainger Engineering, there is no doubt in my mind that she embodies the spirit of this award and is deserving of this accolade.

All my interactions with Alison have been extremely professional but more importantly, have been considerate and kind. She has provided top notch customer service to me and the entire Grainger Engineering team when we have run into issues or needed to work through complicated situations, which are quite frequent in our college. She is thoughtful, takes the time to explain the issue at hand, and approaches the situations in a collaborative manner. Alison does an excellent job considering the college point of view and does everything she can to help us achieve an optimum result while still following research administration policies and procedures.

Alison is also extremely knowledgeable on research administration topics and is an excellent representative of the Sponsored Programs Administration Office. Since I am more knowledgeable on the finance side, there have been multiple occasions when I needed guidance on handling certain sponsored project situations, communicating with sponsors appropriately, and articulating the issue at hand. Alison has always been willing to help with a smile on her face and kindness in her voice. Every single time.

I am thankful for the relationship we have developed over the years. She truly has helped give me the tools to be successful in the research administration aspect of my role. I hope you will consider her as the top candidate to receive the Outstanding Service Award. She is most deserving.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Tessa M. Hile', written in a cursive style.

Tessa M. Hile

Assistant Dean for Finance and Administration

The Grainger College of Engineering

Dear SPaRC Awards Committee,

It is with great enthusiasm that I nominate Alison Morgan, Senior Associate Director of Non-Federal Awards, for the SPaRC Outstanding Service Award. Alison's leadership, innovative spirit, and deep commitment to advancing the effectiveness of Sponsored Programs Administration (SPA) make her a standout candidate for this recognition. Her work has consistently exemplified excellence, and her impact resonates well beyond her own team, contributing meaningfully to the broader research administration ecosystem at the University.

Alison has been a driving force behind some of SPA's most strategic and transformative initiatives over the past year. In particular, she has co-led two major projects that are reshaping the way we do business—**mySPA** and the **Subaward Invoicing System**. These efforts represent more than just improvements to internal workflows; they reflect a forward-thinking approach to solving complex administrative challenges with scalable, sustainable solutions.

Through her leadership on **mySPA**, Alison has helped deliver a user-centered platform that empowers SPA staff to access critical award information and to-dos in real time. The project not only enhances transparency but significantly improves efficiency by reducing the manual steps and communication lags that previously bogged down our processes. Her ability to collaborate across the Data and Systems team, align stakeholders, and keep the end-user experience front and center has been instrumental in the success of this initiative.

The **Subaward Invoicing System**, a long-requested feature set, has likewise benefited from Alison's keen project management and deep understanding of operational needs. This system introduces a new level of accuracy and consistency to how we manage subaward payments, ensuring timely reviews and approvals while reducing the risk of audit findings. The impact of this work extends to faculty and administrators who now have a reliable and streamlined process that saves time and minimizes errors.

Beyond these two major projects, Alison has led several other notable initiatives that are modernizing our approach to award management. One particularly impactful innovation has been the **automation of the Notice of Fund (NOF)**. Previously, distributing these notices was a labor-intensive and error-prone task that often delayed communication to departments. Under Alison's leadership, the process has been fully automated and integrated into the portal, allowing units to receive their NOFs promptly and retrieve them on demand. This advancement not only improves timeliness but also fosters greater autonomy and satisfaction among campus partners.

What sets Alison apart is not just her capacity to lead complex projects, but her eagerness to embrace and champion emerging technologies to improve how we work. She has been an early and enthusiastic adopter of **artificial intelligence (AI)** in her own day-to-day responsibilities, demonstrating how tools like generative AI can be used to save time, reduce repetitive tasks, and focus on higher-value work. More importantly, Alison hasn't kept this knowledge to herself. She has actively shared her experience and strategies with her team and the broader SPA community, helping to foster a culture of innovation and continuous learning.

In fact, her efforts have played a key role in SPA's broader push to explore AI integration across our operations. Whether through informal coaching or structured presentations, Alison has shown a willingness to help others become more comfortable with new tools—an effort that is essential if we are to keep pace with the increasing complexity and scale of research administration. Her mentorship in this area has inspired colleagues to experiment, ask questions, and explore new ways to enhance their productivity.

Alison's contributions are not only technical and procedural; they are also cultural. She consistently brings a positive, collaborative, and mission-driven attitude to her work. Her colleagues trust her judgment, value her transparency, and appreciate her ability to balance strategic vision with operational execution. She is the kind of leader who lifts those around her, creating an environment where innovation can thrive and challenges are met with confidence and curiosity.

In summary, Alison Morgan is more than deserving of this recognition. Her leadership in strategic initiatives like mySPA and subaward invoicing, her foresight in embracing and sharing artificial intelligence applications, and her commitment to operational excellence make her a cornerstone of SPA's continued success. I strongly and wholeheartedly recommend her for the SPaRC Outstanding Service Award.

Sincerely,  
Dan Harmon  
Director, Data and Systems  
Sponsored Programs Administration



## **CARL R. WOESE INSTITUTE FOR GENOMIC BIOLOGY**

1206 W. Gregory Drive, MC-195  
Urbana, IL 61801-3609

July 24, 2025

CONFIDENTIAL

Dear Members of the SPaRC Awards Selection Committee,

We are honored to write this letter of recommendation nominating Alison Gene Morgan for the 2025 SPaRC Outstanding Service Award.

We serve as the Senior Project and Finance Manager of the research project, Realizing Increased Photosynthetic Efficiency (RIPE) (Lisa Emerson) and the current Director of the project (Lisa Ainsworth). Together we have had the privilege of knowing and working closely with Alison for over 12 years, since the inception of RIPE in November 2012. Over the past 12+ years, she has consistently exemplified extraordinary dedication and commitment to the RIPE Directorate, project team, and our sponsors, the Gates Foundation, Gates Agricultural Innovations, and others.

Even though Alison is responsible for countless grants, she always finds a way to prioritize our requests to provide the needed information to our sponsors, particularly when we are preparing our annual progress report. RIPE is a large project (>\$100M) with global partners and we often provide annual progress reports at late notice for approval. Alison quickly navigates the review of our report documents and provides approval in short order, even when she must work past normal business hours. This willingness to go above and beyond to meet the project's requests with an unwavering level of professionalism is greatly appreciated and award-worthy.

Although the Gates Foundation has been the primary sponsor of the RIPE project, in the second phase of funding, we had multiple investors. On more than one occasion, Alison assisted us with navigating some challenging requests with grace, demonstrating outstanding problem-solving skills that involved anticipating issues and offering effective solutions that proved to be a win-win for both RIPE and the sponsors while holding true to university-required policies and procedures.

Alison's institutional knowledge and technical expertise are perhaps unmatched on campus. She truly is a "fountain of knowledge" regarding all things related to sponsored projects. In addition, remarkable organizational skills and exceptional time management are also part of



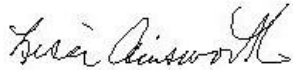
her arsenal of strengths. She possesses a proven ability to efficiently manage tasks, prioritize responsibilities, and streamline processes to continually ensure RIPE's success. RIPE is only one of the projects in Alison's portfolio, and yet she can always find time to offer assistance, respond to requests in a timely manner, and provide valuable guidance.

Moreover, Alison brings a contagious positivity to the workplace that fosters a team spirit and encourages an atmosphere of true collaboration. She embodies the core values of a highly successful organization and team, including the aforementioned commitment, professionalism, collaboration, and also integrity, respect, trust, open and honest communication, accountability, adaptability, and willingness to embrace diversity and inclusion.

The RIPE team is very lucky to have Alison as their post-award administrator, and we cannot think of anyone more deserving to receive this award. Alison truly exemplifies outstanding service in research administration and as noted in this letter, has clearly demonstrated this during her career at the university.

If you have any questions or require additional information, please don't hesitate to contact us. Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Lisa Ainsworth".

Lisa Ainsworth  
Director, RIPE

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Lisa Emerson".

Lisa Emerson  
Senior Project and Finance Manager, RIPE

July 30, 2025

RE: Recommendation for the SPaRC Outstanding Service Award: Alison Morgan

Dear 2025 SPaRC Retreat Committee:

It is my great honor to nominate Alison Morgan for the SPaRC Outstanding Service Award. For almost 10 years, I have had the privilege of reporting directly to Alison. While she has always been my supervisor, our professional relationship has grown into a true collaboration that has benefited not only Sponsored Programs Administration (SPA) but the broader research enterprise at the University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign.

Alison exemplifies the spirit of this award through her unwavering commitment to advancing research administration at Illinois. With over 15 years of dedicated service, she consistently goes above and beyond to improve systems, streamline processes, and foster a culture of collaboration and innovation. Her leadership has had a measurable impact across colleges, departments, and administrative units, and she remains a constant advocate for integrity, efficiency, and excellence in our field.

Alison's active involvement in numerous campus working groups, both within SPA and through university-wide initiatives, has been instrumental in shaping meaningful conversations, advancing strategic priorities, and mentoring research administration professionals across campus. She has supported SPaRC'Ed in numerous roles, including serving as an instructor for multiple seasons, a coach and mentor to other presenters, and a member of the SPaRC'Ed committee. Whether facilitating cross-unit collaboration, or representing Illinois in internal and external presentations, Alison brings deep expertise and a collaborative spirit that inspires others. While many of her contributions occur behind the scenes, they are essential to the continued success of the research enterprise at Illinois.

Alison also serves as SPA's expert representative for the RIPE project through the Gates Foundation, a role she has earned through her exceptional, long-term administration of the project. Her ability to balance high-level service with strict compliance requirements is unmatched, and she makes it look effortless. Whether navigating complex sponsor expectations, or working closely with faculty and administrative partners, Alison approaches every interaction with thoughtfulness, professionalism, and genuine enthusiasm. Her work on RIPE is just one example of the steady, high-impact contributions she makes across the university.

In addition to her service on campus, Alison shares her knowledge of research administration with the broader professional community. She has presented at the National Council of University Research Administrators (NCURA) conferences on two occasions, with both presentations selected for publication. Her dedication to professional development and

knowledge-sharing reflects her deep commitment to elevating the field of research administration at Illinois and nationally.

One of the things I admire most about Alison is her ability to lead with both vision and purpose. She empowers her team, encourages professional growth, and fosters a work environment where ideas are valued and challenges are met with thoughtful, practical solutions. Her passion for supporting the research mission at Illinois is evident in every initiative she takes on, and her impact resonates far beyond our unit. On a personal level, I know I would not be where I am today without Alison's mentorship, coaching, and unwavering investment in my professional development. She has challenged me, supported me, and created opportunities for growth that have shaped the course of my research administration career. Through her example and guidance, she has not only shaped my approach but has influenced many others within SPA and across campus to prioritize thoughtful, responsive customer service in research administration, ensuring we serve our faculty and research community with both professionalism and a strong commitment to excellence.

Alison's leadership, service, and enduring dedication to the research community make her an ideal candidate for the SPaRC Outstanding Service Award. I am proud to work alongside her and wholeheartedly support her nomination.

Sincerely,



Michelle Ward  
Senior Assistant Director, Award Management – Non-Federal  
Sponsored Programs Administration  
University of Illinois Urbana-Champaign