UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

What We Heard: Computer Equipment Procurement

Date range: February 27, 2025 - June 26, 2025
Participants: Faculty, departmental leaders, information technology (IT) personnel and administrative representatives
Focus area: Obtaining feedback on implementing standardized computer equipment procurement

Executive Summary

This report summarizes stakeholder feedback received during the four-month consultation period on the university's initiative to standardize computer procurement. Contributors included faculty, department chairs, IT leads and administrative decision-makers. The aim was to gather insight into what support, resources and communications are needed to ensure successful implementation as well as to capture broader concerns or ideas for refinement.

Key themes include the need for clear communication, flexibility for researchers, local implementation support and clarity around the policy's scope and intent. Stakeholders also expressed concerns about potential procurement delays and the impact upon researchers and their workflows.

Engagement Overview

Pre-focus group presentations: College General Managers, Faculty General Managers and Academic Department Managers, Statutory Deans' Council and Chairs' Council
Focus groups held: 19
- **Total participants:** 51
  - Administrators: 27
  - Researchers: 24
- **Units represented:** College of Health Sciences (6), College of Natural and Applied Sciences (26), College of Social Sciences and Humanities (8), Vice-President Academic (5), Vice-President Research and Innovation (6)

- **Faculty IT groups engaged:** SciTech, EngIT, Tech in Ed, Business IT, Arts Resource Centre, Library IT and ITOC.
- **Additional engagements:** information session (College of Social Sciences and Humanities), individual consultations and survey-based feedback.

Key Themes

In parallel to the initiative's launch, a targeted feedback form was provided to stakeholders during consultation. Fourteen individual responses were received across academic and administrative units. Common themes included:

1. **The need for clarity and communication**
   Multiple respondents requested clear, early, and repeated messaging about:
   - what is changing and why
   - the difference between this initiative and past decentralized practices
   - who it applies to (administrative vs research-funded equipment), and
   - Professional Expense Reimbursement (PER) and PCard compliance issues.
2. **Researcher autonomy and procurement flexibility**
   Engineering and Arts emphasized the importance of preserving researcher autonomy, noting that:
   - standardization should not be mandatory for research-funded equipment
   - specialized hardware needs and dynamic research environments may not align with a standardized approach, and
   - consultations and pilot projects were requested before full implementation.
3. **Equity and timeliness concerns**
   Several respondents highlighted disparities between disciplines:
   - Social Sciences and Humanities Research Council (SSHRC)-funded researchers often lack resources compared to Natural Sciences and Engineering Research Council (NSERC)/Canadian Institutes of Health Research (CIHR) counterparts.

There were also concerns about longer procurement lead times undermining the value proposition of the standardization effort.

4. **Suggestions for service improvements**
   - to add or expand lab-specific offerings
   - improve support mechanisms and IT engagement

UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA

- ○ clarify evergreen tracking processes and timelines, and
    - ○ offer multiple tiers of device options.
5. **Recommendations to help mitigate reputational and change management risks**
    - ○ Several voices warned that without visible endorsement from institutional leadership and transparent consequences for non-compliance, buy-in would suffer.

Actions Taken

Throughout the consultation process, contributors offered a wide range of perspectives, from specific recommendations to broader concerns. The implementation team carefully reviewed this input to identify and action suggestions that could improve this initiative.

Of the 98+ unique suggestions captured during this process, **50 actionable items** were directly incorporated into implementation. Constructive feedback was prioritized; general complaints or opposition without a proposed solution were documented but not used to shape the program. There are also 39 actionable items that we are currently reviewing to determine if and how they can be actioned.

Below is a high-level summary of the remaining **key incorporated suggestions**, which included but were not limited to:

- by adding three new standard configurations identified by the feedback we are able to reduce deployment time by 75.6% from a non-standard device
- launching a researcher-specific component to existing offerings
- updated timelines and procurement guidance
- enhancing communications to clarify scope, benefits and support structure
- improving support for Linux and instrument-specific computing needs, and
- creating lab-centric offerings and expanding inventory for improved deployment timelines.

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Key Incorporated Suggestions Summary Table

Suggestion	Action Taken	Result
Adjust computer offerings to reflect lab requirements	Added one instrument computer + exploring a tiered solution for lab-configured standard offerings that would include compute, storage and network. This could potentially be available at the onboarding or start-up phase.	Improved IT support for labs
Create research lab bundles for onboarding	Instrument lab computer created; hub-and-spoke layouts being explored	Improved onboarding experience for new faculty members
Clarify storage for video research environments	Engagement with IT Digital research contacts underway to develop an intake form for similar requests	Improved communication pathways
Media pitch to CSSH	Information session delivered with IST Strategic Initiatives Officer's support	Increased awareness and engagement
Improve delivery times	Added three plus standard offerings to inventory	75.6% faster deployment
Enable quote access for grant use	This feature has been integrated into ticketing	Supports funding processes
Reduce ordering friction and clicks	SupplyNet now links directly to order form	Enhanced user experience

UNIVERSITY OF ALBERTA

Evergreen communications	Evergreen program information updated online	Informed budget planning
Communicate delivery timelines	Timelines are now live and clearly outlined on the website	Improved planning accuracy
Increase in-stock offerings	Increased from one to four configurations	Reduced delays
Provide legacy Operation System (OS) mitigation	A knowledge base article was prepared. Currently working on an external facing version of it.	Enables safer legacy system use
Add deployment checklist	Checklist added post-installation	Strengthens documentation and support
Include researcher use cases	Added to order form and web content	Enhances usability and clarity
Clarification of imaging and endpoint support	Added to knowledge-based articles and support workflows	Enhances usability and clarity
Request for a detailed FAQ, town hall or kickoff meeting	Developed an extensive FAQ document to be circulated with participants and others. Information sessions have been offered to all three colleges and remain available upon request.	Improved communication pathways and enhanced awareness
Concern over researcher autonomy	Not all requests for opt-out will be honoured, however, implementation includes continuous improvement and allows room for feedback	Improved communication pathways and enhanced engagement and collaboration

Some feedback, while noted, could not be incorporated because it:

- conflicted with institutional policy or procurement practices
- offered commentary critical of change without engaging in dialogue toward improvement
- reflected misunderstandings about cybersecurity requirements (e.g., hardware uniformity)
- requested exceptions incompatible with operational sustainability (e.g., warranty removal, unlimited PER exceptions).

Conclusion

The rollout of the computer equipment procurement initiative was significantly enhanced by meaningful engagement and targeted input. Constructive feedback translated directly into new offerings, refined communications and improved service. While not every concern led to a structural change, all input contributed to refining the communications, timelines, guidance and governance model of this initiative. We thank all contributors for their perspectives and participation during consultation.

Feedback collected through surveys, focus groups, consultations and departmental outreach consistently emphasized the need for clarity, flexibility and respect for diverse research needs. These principles now lay the foundation of the initiative's rollout:

- Concerns about research autonomy led to a flexible framework where researchers can engage the Digital Research team for a meaningful consultation prior to placing their order as well as still use PER or grant funds for eligible purchases, provided devices meet baseline security and supportability requirements.
- Frustrations with delivery timelines prompted an inventory strategy, resulting in significantly reduced turnaround times (as short as 5–10 business days for in-stock models).
- Feedback about specialized computing needs directly informed the creation of new standard lab offerings, instrumentation bundles and support pathways for non-standard requests.
- Requests for clear communication and campus-wide consistency led to the launch of a centralized request form, a detailed FAQ and targeted outreach to departments through deans, faculty general managers and faculty IT leads.

UNIVERSITY
OF ALBERTA

- Questions around procurement roles helped clarify IST's implementation support while preserving local IT collaboration and ongoing involvement from departmental leads.

This initiative is not a fixed policy imposed from above — it is the product of iterative design, faculty engagement and shared problem-solving. Stakeholders raised critical concerns early and often, and those concerns were not only heard but acted upon.

In addition to changes in process and structure, the Computer Equipment Procurement Initiative web page was developed directly in response to feedback. Stakeholders requested greater clarity and transparency around scope, purpose, timelines, frequently asked questions and myth-busting. The resulting page now serves as a living resource to support the university community in navigating this transition.

As the process continues, a commitment to continuous improvement remains central. New use cases will arise, and feedback mechanisms will remain open to adapt accordingly. The success of this initiative relies not only on technical delivery, but on maintaining the trust and collaboration of the academic and research community that it is designed to support.

For further updates or to view live standard configurations and inventory, visit the Workstation Offerings web page.

Appendices

- Appendix A: Focus Group Presentation Deck (available on request)
- Appendix B: Workstation Offerings Website
- Appendix C: Computer Equipment Procurement Initiative Webpage
- Appendix D: Frequently Asked Questions (FAQ) Document