



NIH eRA Commons Working Group (CWG) Minutes

Date: Wednesday, January 9, 2008
Location: Washington, DC
Chair: Megan Columbus
Next Meeting: Wednesday, May 14, 2008

Action Items

1. (CWG Participants) Discuss potential issues/problems faculty may have with reviewer's personal DUNS numbers appearing in the personal profile section of the eRA Commons. Communicate concerns to Marcia Hahn (hahnm@od.nih.gov) by Friday, January 18, 2008.
2. (Marcia Hahn) Communicate to the grants management community that once a Multiple Active Applications (MAA) is awarded, all other versions are withdrawn, releasing applicants from the responsibility of having to manually withdraw their additional applications.
3. (Scarlett Gibb) Within eRA Commons, re-examine the possibility of allowing an SO or AO to see all applications, including those which had errors and those deemed successful and moved forward in the process in a single action.
4. (Scarlett Gibb) Discuss with programmers the complexities and possibilities of changing the start date for project budget periods (when matching subaward periods on eRA eXchange) to a more open range of dates.
5. (Scarlett Gibb, Sheri Cummins, Prachi Patel) As xTrain changes are made, and the platform goes live, communicate target dates with external audiences.
6. (Prachi Patel) Once NIH's schedule to transition is finalized, create/post a graphical representation of the Adobe transition timeline.

Handouts & Presentations

- [eRA Commons, Policy and eSubmission updates](#)
- [Request to include Reviewer DUNS in profile](#)
- [Multiple Active Applications](#)
- [New status codes](#)

DUNS Numbers

Presenters: Ev Sinnett and Sam Edwards

Handout: [Request to include Reviewer DUNS in profile](#)

Discussions Points:

- A request to include a reviewer's personal DUNS number within the personal profile on eRA Commons was made. DUNS numbers have been required for reviewer payment purposes since 2005 and prior to payment, there must be a match on the reviewers name, SSN and DUNS number.

- The DUNS number was added to the eRA database for NIH entry/access in 2007. NIH has populated the field by doing a manual search in DUNS on the reviewer name. Look-up errors/ambiguity may occur in three ways: the home address in DUNS differs from that in eRA (including exclusion of the address or different states listed), common names can appear twice for the same institution and a person's professional name may not match the name used on tax forms.
- Adding the DUNS number to the reviewer Commons fields can be beneficial in: keeping responsibility for entering the information with the person who can verify its correctness, improving information accuracy, eradicating (aforementioned) errors/ambiguity and expediting the payment process.
- The reviewer's DUNS field would be included on the Reviewer Address screen of the Personal Profile. This placement would reduce confusion between the personal DUNS number used by reviewers and the institutional DUNS number used for application submission. A recommendation was made to provide access to guidance on how Reviewers would obtain a DUNS number if they saw the field in the profile and had not yet gone through the DUNS process. Ev indicated that this information also could be included in their communications to reviewers.
- Proposed text to accompany the new DUNS number field was shared, primarily highlighting the importance of a reviewer providing their own DUNS number, and not that of the institution.
- Concerns from the working group were raised regarding the fact that faculty serving as reviewers do so as individuals and not as institution representatives. Is it appropriate to use the institutional records for this purpose? The group generally agreed that responsibility for accuracy remained with the Reviewer/PI.

Action: (CWG Participants) Discuss potential issues/problems faculty may have with reviewer's personal DUNS numbers appearing in the personal profile section of the eRA Commons. Communicate concerns to Marcia Hahn (hahn@od.nih.gov) by Friday, January 18, 2008.

Multiple Active Applications (MAA)

Presenter: Suzanne Fisher, Ph.D.

Handout: [Multiple Active Applications](#)

Discussion Points:

- NIH is changing how it handles amended grant applications (resubmissions) due to recent initiatives, such as special deadlines for new investigator applications responding to reviewer feedback from the previous round; expedited review for fellowships, small business, AIDS applications and pilots; earlier review meetings/faster Summary Statement Production; spreading due dates; and, continuous receipt for member applications.
- Currently, the eRA system only supports one version of a grant application being active in the system at a time.
- When an A1 (or A2) is assigned in referral, any previous version is withdrawn.

- It is now common to receive an amended version of an application (marked as a resubmission on the electronic form) before the previous one has made its way completely through the council/advisory board and funding decision processes at NIH.
- With the new MAA feature, an A1 (or A2) application may be submitted even if the prior application has yet to be reviewed by council.
- Following a software update in February, the eRA system will allow Multiple Active Applications (MAA). The system will keep all versions (e.g., 01, A1, A2) of an application active and will provide an internal "MAA" flag for each application in an active cluster. If any version of an application in a cluster is awarded, all other applications within the cluster will be automatically withdrawn without any additional action by applicants or NIH staff.

Action: (Marcia Hahn) Communicate to the grants management community that once a Multiple Active Applications (MAA) is awarded all other versions are withdrawn, releasing applicants from the responsibility of having to manually withdraw their additional applications.

eRA Commons

Presenter: Scarlett Gibb

Handout: [eRA Commons, Policy and eSubmission updates](#)

xTrain Pilot Update

Discussion Points:

- There are nine medical institutions participating in the xTrain Pilot. Great feedback has been provided, including: the need to examine the flow of Trainee account set-up/ profile updates in relation to the PD/PI initiation of Trainee appointments and e-mail notification distributions. A brief thank you was expressed for their feedback.
- Training for the pilot was held via web conference on November 28. Participants provided positive feedback on the web conference format.
- The pilot began December 3. Two showstoppers were quickly identified and resolved including: viewing the current support year from the Trainee Roster and creating a Commons account for trainees. The data entry portion of the pilot has been extended to January 31 to make up for time that was lost in addressing these initial issues.
- As raised in a previous CWG meeting, the pilot participants would like the delegation of duties from a PI to an ASST to be handled in one consolidated area. An enhancement request is open for this issue.
- The xTrain resource Web site will not be included in the eRA site navigation until xTrain is open for general use, but it can be accessed at http://era.nih.gov/services_for_applicants/other/xTrain.cfm.
- xTrain is available in the External User Acceptance Testing (Ext-UAT) environment for non-pilot participants who are interested in experimenting with the system. The link is <http://commons.uat.era.nih.gov/commons/>. The content of the initial Commons screen in EXT-UAT looks different than production, but full Commons functionality is available. Ext-UAT contains a copy of production data through September 6, 2007.

eAdditions for NIH Staff

Discussion Points:

- eAdditions is a new tool for NIH staff which allows Scientific Review Officers (SROs) to add documents to the grant folder post-submission. These documents are accessible to reviewers and appropriate NIH staff.
- eAdditions does not alter the original application and there is no change in policy for application addenda (addenda approved and added at discretion of the SRO).
- Applicants have view-only access to addenda in eRA Commons Status via a link under the “Other Relevant Documents” section called “Additions for Review”.

Recent Status Changes

Discussion Points:

- A new status screen allows for efficient navigation through the site. The screen is divided into two primary sections, including Recent/Pending eSubmissions (items requiring action to complete the submission process, applications which have been refused by the SO or are within the two-day viewing window) and List of Applications/Grants (submitted successfully and are available for post-submission status).
- Since October 2007, applicants have been able to use the Grants.gov tracking number throughout the lifecycle of the application grant.
- The CWG conveyed their desire to be able to have their SO or AO search applications by submission date for internal reporting purposes (as they were able to prior to the Status changes). They also expressed an interest in viewing and searching for all applications, including those with prior errors and those that were successful. This allows them, not only to report on all activity, but to address any training and support needs by looking at trends. The utility of being able to reference the NIH grant number was also discussed.
 - NIH expressed concerns that response issues may be reintroduced if the ability to view/search all activity were to be combined again. The group expressed that limiting the search to a 6-12 month time frame would be an acceptable compromise.

Action: (Scarlett Gibb) Within eRA Commons, re-examine the possibility of allowing an SO or AO to see all applications, including those which had errors and those deemed successful and moved forward in the process in a single action.

New Status Codes

Handouts: [New status codes](#)

Discussion Points:

- The new status codes which appear in the Current Application Status column are more descriptive. The new codes are posted at http://era.nih.gov/files/new_status_codes.pdf.
- The group asked that any updates be communicated and posted.

October and December eRA eXchange Release

Discussion Points:

- The October eRA eXchange release focused on several things: extensive business rule validations for new grant programs (including SC1, SC2, SC3 and U34), updated

eSubmission email notifications to reflect eRA Commons Status changes, added ability to collect the area of science from Pioneer Award (DP1) and New Innovator (DP2) applications and store the information in the IMPAC II database for further electronic processing and corrections made to the interface used to download electronic applications from Grants.gov to NIH.

- NIH is moving the Web services available to system-to-system users to the standard Web Service format (currently use ebXML format). Following the change, usage is expected to increase since system-to-system providers can use the same technology for interfaces with Grants.gov and NIH. Information about the services can be found at: http://era.nih.gov/ElectronicReceipt/system_webserv.htm.
- Corrections were made to the \$250K and \$500K subtotal direct cost calculations. They now match-up subaward periods with project budget periods based on the start date. CWG members asked to explore the possibility of making this a range of dates rather than just an exact date.

Action: (Scarlett Gibb) Discuss with programmers the complexities and possibilities of changing the start date for project budget periods (when matching subaward periods on eRA eXchange) to a more open range of dates.

Coming Attraction

Discussion Points:

- Based on preliminary feedback from the xTrain pilot, several changes will be implemented: a screen clean-up, workflow corrections (including requiring comment when NIH staff returns a submission and additional information added to the notifications), corrected pre-population of Payback form and fixing the Trainee account issue when multiple affiliations exist.
- DP1 changes include corrections to reference letter email text to referee and changes to reference letter screen to provide flexibility in RFA/PA number format. The question of whether or not there is enough communications around the Pioneer award was raised.
- Within Commons there will be an ongoing maintenance effort for performance and stability.
- Currently, Financial Conflict of Interest (FCOI) is a high visibility topic at NIH and within Congress. Commons is currently creating tools to be used for NIH staff to better assist with navigating through this issue. Commons is also examining methods to provide conflict information from grantees electronically through eRA Commons.

Action: (Scarlett Gibb, Sheri Cummins, Prachi Patel) As xTrain changes are made, and the platform goes live, communicate target dates with external audiences.

Policy Update

Presenter: Marcia Hahn

Status towards requiring Just-In-Time, Closeout and eSnap

Discussion Points:

- Just-In-Time remains a priority in 2008 and the first step of the New Year will be to conduct a focus group. The requirements brought forth at the September meeting have been documented and analysis has begun, including the need to review the entire process, with an emphasis on e-notifications and the fine tuning of other features.

- Efforts to move towards requiring electronic Closeout continue. A focus group was formed and began meeting in the fall to discuss GCM improvements. Changes on the Commons side must be coordinated with complimentary changes in internal administration modules. There also are efforts in place to work on a major business process change to consolidate Closeout actions at NIH into the centralized Division of Extramural Activities Support (DEAS) unit. The process change will provide more consistent processes across NIH Institutes.
- OPERA is currently compiling a list of eSNAP changes needed to accommodate OMB approved updates to the PHS 2590. This list will be forwarded to eRA. Other eSNAP fixes and enhancements may be addressed at the same time. After enhancements are evaluated, there will be an assessment to decide if the use of this tool should be required. One factor that may have an impact is the Fed wide Research Performance Progress Report (the comment period ended on January 8, 2008).

Form Changes

Discussion Points:

- The new OMB approved PHS 398 was posted and subsequent Guide Notices were issued. For electronic submission, the Checklist Component will have a new Disclosure Permission statement. The expiration date will be removed from all other PHS 398 components to eliminate the need for a form update when the date changes. All revision requests were submitted to Grants.gov the week of January 7. (These revision requests will be in a separate queue for forms revision).
- The SF424 (R&R) currently has two separate revision efforts. The first is with FFATA changes which primarily affect the Project Performance site component (adding the DUNS number and Congressional District). The second revision effort is because of the regular OMB approval for the SF424 (R&R). The current form expires in April 2008 and the R&R working group has compiled a list of changes that have been forwarded to Grants.gov to be included in the OMB Clearance process. This will include a normal Fed Register Notice/comment period. A timeframe has not been established yet.
- Included among the list of changes forwarded to Grants.gov for the SF424 (R&R) are:
 - SBIR/STTR component will be cleared within the R&R and will therefore no longer be NIH-specific.
 - Five Cover Components are also being changed: In item four there will be a new field for Agency Routing Identifier (agencies can use this optional field as needed); Item 14 will have the congressional Districts of Projects deleted (and this information will be captured on the Project/Performance site instead); Item 16 will have a separate field for Total Non-Federal Funds added; Item 18 will have an added document upload field for lobbying certification, etc (this is a generic upload form); Item 21 will have the additional congressional districts upload field deleted.
 - Within Other Project Information, Item 1 of the reorder HS section will have a new question added asking, "Is the Project Exempt from Federal Regulations? Yes/No. A question (stemming from a new law) will be asked asking about the impact of the study on "Historical Places." This question will be placed among the environmental impact questions.

- In the Senior/Key Person Profile section several changes include: the adding of a degree type field, the adding of a degree year field and the adding of two more values in the Project Role LOV (Postdoctoral scholar and co-investigator). The two new values will be placed at the bottom of the list, next to the Co-PI. CWG members raised the issue that if one person is deleted from the profile, then anyone in the system behind that person will get deleted as well. Another issue was that degrees between agencies do not always match-up.
 - System-to-system solution providers noted that when additional structured data fields are added, it is helpful if there is an agreed upon set of values to alleviate the burden of trying to meet agency specific requirements in their automated solutions.
- Form functionality issues were assessed in the Budget section. The desire to allow the salary and fringe columns to be blank was incorporated, as was the desire to have just a bottom line per category (which CWG members mentioned they use for streamlining budget). Other Budget component proposed changes are the ability to auto fill future years' data from year 1, allowing the budget justification to be loaded last and accommodating skip year budgets (members mentioned that if there is activity in years 1 and 3, but not in year 2 they then have to input a zero value for year 2).
- The group asked if the Subaward form would be expanded to allow for more than 10 subawards. A similar question was also raised about expanding the budget form to allow more than five budget periods. Marcia indicated these had previously been on Grants.gov's list, but she will verify they are still on their radar through her participation on the R&R working group.

eFSR: Changes to Accommodate New FFR

Discussion Points:

- An electronic Financial Status Report (eFSR) required for all FSRs submitted on or after October 1, 2007
- The new Federal Financial Report (FFR) will have an affect on eFSR. The FFR Fed Register Notice was issued on December 7, 2007 and comments were due by January 7, 2008. NIH has provided comments to HHS for a consolidated response, including significant feedback on the proposed changes in the timing of reporting and period of reporting.
- Until the form is final it is difficult to begin revising the eFSR, but preliminary analysis comparing current data fields with the new ones has begun. Most of the data fields are still present, but the order and some names have changed.
- The immediate requirement will be focused on the annual reporting portion for Expenditures & Unobligated Balance. But, the long-term hope is to establish a link with Payment Management System (PMS) through eFSR since the form is a combined 272 & FSR reporting. (Ensures that e-FSR has all new fields and maybe some additional ones that can be disabled if deemed unnecessary).
- Other fields for Federal Cash may be added but grayed out/disabled at this time.
- Issues: Although the final form is not yet published, the previous version will expire in September 2008, which does not provide enough time to implement changes. Also, after the

new form comes out, S-to-S will not be immediately ready and they may have people reverting to the print versions.

- Marcia encouraged CWG members to take advantage of the Federal Register notice comment period and the comment periods for the other notices mentioned at the meeting.

e-Submission Update

Presenter: Megan Columbus

Discussions Points:

- As of January 8, 2008, the error correction window was reduced from 5 business days to 2. CWG members did not notice any initial reaction, and it was mentioned that many of them had, from the beginning, told their PIs that they only had 2 days.
- NIH is currently completing new forms testing for the transition from PureEdge to Adobe forms. NIH is working with Grants.gov to address issues identified during testing that must be correct before moving forward. If form issues are addressed, several FOAs with Adobe packages will be posted in spring 2008 and awareness will be raised through NIH Guide Notices.

Action: (Prachi Patel) Provide link to [Adobe test application](#) to the CWG listserv.

Action: (Prachi Patel) Once NIH's schedule to transition is finalized, create/post a graphical representation of the Adobe transition timeline.

- If there are no major issues with the preliminary Adobe forms, then a full transition will quickly follow, with target completion set for summer 2008.
- NIH still requires applicant intuitions that use system-to-system solutions to process their applications through the Grants.gov 2006 system. Currently, any applications processed through the 2007 system result in application images that do not include the full text of some fields (only the portion of text visible in the form text box is captured). In addition, the form navigation buttons appear in the assembled image (although they are not functional). These issues prevent our reviewers from being able to work with the images. Once these issues are resolved by Grants.gov, NIH will be able to accept applications through the 2007 system.
- The large, standing submission dates for February and March 2008 will continue to use PureEdge forms.
Update: [Standing submission dates](#) in April also will use PureEdge.
- A suggestion was made to post new Funding Opportunity Announcements at least for the Parent FOAs rather than just changing the application package when transitioning to Adobe.

(Megan Columbus) Consider posting new Parent FOAs for Adobe transition.

- Transition of Fellowships (F), Career Development (K), Training (T) and complex grant programs are still on Within eRA Commons, re-examine the possibility of allowing an SO or AO to see all applications, including those which had errors and those deemed successful and moved forward in the process in a single action.
- Some CWG attendees mentioned ongoing concerns regarding the assignment of the PI role within eRA Commons to students. The designation of PI holds a very specific status in many

institutions. To resolve this issue, some universities are maintaining two database fields one for the sponsored PI and one for the institutional PI.

- How to best handle administrative supplements electronically is currently being analyzed. Now, grantees submit all supplementary requests directly to the awarding IC on the PHS 398. One disadvantage is the necessity of NIH and grantees to continue using both the PHS 398 and the SF 424 systems which prevents the full integration of the electronic system. NIH would like to use submission through Grants.gov on the SF424 (R&R). Targeted FOAs would be developed for all announced supplement programs (such as those for reentry and diversity). System changes may be needed to route applications directly to the applicable IC for review.