eRA Paperless Business Practices Work Group

Date:	September 24, 2002
Time:	3:00–4:30 pm
Location:	Rockledge 2, Room 3087
Advocate:	Steve Hausman
Analyst:	Mike Cox

Next meeting: **October 22, 2002, Rockledge 2, Room 3087, 3:00–4:30 p.m.**

Scanning Update

Michael Cox

Mike reported the following information:

- More than 37,500 applications have been scanned since Jan. 1, 2002.

- The average application scan is about 5.6 MB.

- The average number of pages is 66.

- The largest applications thus far were more than 2,000 pages each. Many range from 400–900 pages each.

- An average of 219 applications are scanned a day. However, 610 applications were scanned on March 22—the most in a day.

- The scanning process includes translating the scanned image to a TIF image, to PDF, to the finished, bookmarked image in PDF.

- It takes two days for the scanning process, at which time the images are transferred into IMPAC II.

- 140 applications, which were sent to be scanned, somehow were missed. These are being processed now and should be in IMPAC II in the next few days.

Issues

Macintosh compatibility—Those people who are using Mac OS 10 have only the Adobe Acrobat Viewer, which is the default. However, users need the whole Acrobat application to read the electronic images. Working through a solution.

Grant numbers—The grant naming convention should be standardized by grant number on the CD and not by ascendant number. Working through a solution.

Revised Legacy Scanning Plan

Steve Hausman

The plan for scanning legacy files—all those applications that now are sitting on shelves—has been delayed until next spring because of eRA project budget issues. Consequently, only the pilot will be tested to scan and store some existing 398 (competing) and 2590 (non-competing) applications. However, an interface must be in place to retrieve this data. Work will continue on developing the retrieval

infrastructure now. In addition, IMPAC II does not have the storage space and isn't structured for legacy data at this time.

NCI has a system called eGrants Retrieval System, which is a powerful search engine. Most of the images in the NCI eGrants come from IMPAC II. NCI eGrants has to stay completely compatible with IMPAC II to retrieve the data it needs. In fact, it will have to migrate to J2EE to stay up with IMPAC II. To make it completely compatible and part of the eRA project, there would have to be modifications for which there are no funds.

Discussion of Future Directions

Steve Hausman

Steve posed these two questions: Where are we going? What should we accomplish? The scanning of legacy files is a given for future development. However, it is also a given that the volume of scanning should diminish in future with the advent of the new Commons Version 2.0 for electronic submission of grant applications. However, unless the NIH mandates a no-paper policy, there will always be a percentage of applications and correspondence that have to be scanned for electronic storage and retrieval. The adoption of digital signatures will also contribute to establishing a true paperless workplace.

By the years 2004–2005, Steve thinks that there will be a need to scan a small percentage of documents. These could be scanned at the office level. The issues in that case would be: what do we do with the scanned data from an office and how do we not only make it available for retrieval but how do we let people know that it is actually available? By that time, digital datastreaming should allow the electronic storage and retrieval of color and graphs, so common in many applications.

During the group discussion, it was commented that the eRA architects should be focusing on and building processes that work with electronic grant folders. There should be one workflow/process that includes: review, award, clearance. Users will need tools for a paperless world, with tablet computers to take to meetings and even wireless connections.

Right now, however, the group noted that paper plays a role, especially when information from the application must be keyed into another application, like the progress report. If a paper copy is not available, then a split screen, or perhaps two screens, would be useful to transfer data from one place to another. However, in the future, the system could automatically populate the appropriate reports and database fields for electronic retrieval, making manual entry redundant. The group agreed, however, that there will always be appropriate uses for paper.

We need to convince IT groups to start to change the infrastructure to accommodate the coming paperless environment. This involves address these issues:

- FOIA needs to be kept in mind.

- How do you organize an official, electronic file?

- What kind of security must be in place?

The real focus for the future is in moving from the concept of a *scanned application* with set formats and defined reports to a mindset of managing *information*—storing information and retrieving information. The grant data would be available in the central database and each user would have the interface to retrieve whatever data they need for their part of the process. Everyone will have to move from thinking about "forms" to thinking about "information."

So, in the short-term, applications are scanned and made available as PDF images. The next stage will see the applications submitted electronically, using a particular datastream standard, and made available as a PDF images. The last stage will see the applications submitted electronically, the data dispersed to populate the database, and the data retrieved through specialized interfaces to defined user groups.

The NCI is conducting a test in October, using NCI eGrants, taking one type of application and processing them electronically from start to finish. Those who have used NCI eGrants to retrieve data have had a good response. NCI realizes that the transition to electronic processing is inevitable and is starting the transition now.

In summary, Mike Cox observed that the eRA system is close to reproducing the various NIH forms related to grants processing. However, it is not close to pulling out only relevant data from a database.

There are two ways to move people to new ways of doing work or using a new computer application:

- Teach people how to use the interface before they are let loose on the computer.

- Put the electronic documents on-line, give people tools and an interface, and let them figure it out.

Some of both methods would probably work.

Attendees

Carter, Dave (OD)	Hausman, Steve (NIAMS)	Seppala, Sandy (LTS/OCO)
Coombs, Roger (Quality Assoc.)	Liberman, Ellen (NEI)	Sinnett, Ev (CSR)
	Mason, Melvin (CIT)	Stanfield, Brent (CSR)
Cox, Michael (OD)	McKay, Richard (CSR)	Vollberg, Thomas (NCI)
Fisher, Suzanne (CSR)	Milman, Gregory (NIAID)	
Hagan, Ann (NIGMS)	Niles, Glen (Quality Associates)	