# eCGAP Focus Group

**Date:**         Tuesday, October 19, 2004
**Time:**         12:00 –2:00 p.m.
**Location:**    Rockledge 1, Room 8111
**Advocate:**   Jennifer Flach

**Next Meeting:** Tuesday, November 2, 9:00 a.m.–11:00 pm., Rockledge 1, RM 2198

## Actions Items

1. (All) Suggest wording of purpose statement for newly expanded eCGAP Focus Group. Individually define own role in focus group.

2. (Sara Silver) Demonstrate at next meeting the changes made to Peer Review and Receipt and Referral modules.

3. (Jennifer Flach) Make an eCGAP presentation to a select group of the External Review Committee at the Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality (AHRQ).

## Introductions

The inaugural meeting of the newly expanded group began with introductions. New inductees include David George (NIBIB), Sandy Karen (HRSA), Kelly Long (HRSA), George (Skip) Moyer (AHRQ), Chris Myers (NIDCD), Edward Myrbeck (NIAMS), Valerie Prenger (NHLBI), Melissa Stick (NIDCD), Amy Swain (NCRR) and Janna Wehrle (NIGMS). eCGAP team leader Jennifer Flach noted that while it had made sense initially for the original CGAP group to primarily focus on Review as well as Receipt and Referral stakeholders, it is now equally important for the CGAP group to get all business areas including Operating Divisions (OPDIVs) or federal agencies involved in the project. Their input would prove valuable as an evolving eCGAP would affect all downstream processes. She noted that CGAP has been rechristened eCGAP to reflect its mission of helping NIH move from paper receipt of grants to electronic receipt.

*Role of group*—Jennifer stated that she visualized the role of the focus group as stakeholders offering input on the design and development of the eCGAP and eRA eXchange system. Group members would identify issues, bringing to the table policy pronouncements or changes in business processes that could have an impact on design; finalize requirements and gain a consensus before implementation; verify the draft design; define how to set up future pilots and participate in pilots.

*Meeting logistics*—The group will meet every two weeks in the beginning and gradually move to once every three weeks. Jennifer stated that the group may also be asked to vote on issues, so that decisions are reached by consensus. The group will not be getting into highly technical issues, she assured the group, some of whom had expressed concern that they did not have a technical background. If they did discuss technical issues, it would be explained in plain language. Jennifer

urged members to suggest the wording for a purpose statement for the newly expanded group as well as individually define their own role in the group.

**Action:  (All) Suggest wording of purpose statement for newly expanded eCGAP Group. Individually define own role in focus group.**

## Presentation: Overview of eCGAP and eRA eXchange

*Jennifer Flach*
[http://era.nih.gov/docs/eCGAP focus group 1.pdf](http://era.nih.gov/docs/eCGAP focus group 1.pdf)

Jennifer stated that eCGAP – electronic Competitive Grant Application Process – is a system–to-system exchange between NIH and the companies that are providing the user interface with NIH to enable applicants to submit grants electronically (these companies are collectively called Service Providers). Six companies have been funded through Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) grants to develop the software for the user interface. NIH itself is not developing the user interface. There are some pieces of the processing that occur within NIH eRA Commons (NIH's interface to the outside world) but the submissions themselves are handled by the Service Providers. Currently, six Service Providers have offered very different products to the grantee community. It is up to the grantees in the community to decide which Service Provider they would like to use. Jennifer stated that she was hopeful that other commercial companies will get into the Service Provider business. Two or three companies, including a couple of research institutions such as UT Southwestern, have shown interest in using their grant submission system for this purpose. eCGAP is one component of the eRA eXchange, the ultimate system-to-system, electronic exchange that will be used for a number of different transactions. For instance, the eXchange will have the ability in the future to send out electronic Notice of Grant Awards (eNGAs) in a data stream that can be downloaded by the applicant, a message that goes out via email currently. The eNGA will be the first major outgoing transaction for the eRA eXchange and will probably be piloted in early 2005.

*Electronic receipt*—The Service Provider converts the grant application to XML (eXtensible Markup Language) plus attachments and transmits the grant application via the eRA eXchange. The application passes through the business validations and then the data is moved into eCGAP Receipt and Referral and other eRA systems.

*Pilots*—eCGAP has completed three pilots for simple modular grants during which a total of 45 grant applications were received. The October and November pilot are ongoing; 30 applications were received for the Oct. 1 receipt date, of which 26 were verified including one full budget application. About 50 are expected for the Nov.1 receipt date. Full budget applications in November are limited to five per Service Provider. The October-November pilots are being viewed as a dress rehearsal for NIH and Service Providers for January 2005, when receipt of simple modular grants, (new, competing continuation and revised) goes into full production.

*Upcoming pilots and production*—For each new addition, the eCGAP team conducts three to four pilots to test the new feature before declaring full production for it.  The first pilot will be a live test with one to eight applications; the second will be limited to under 30 applications and the third will have no limit, provided everything has gone smoothly in pilot two. For the next grant cycle receipt dates, full-budget applications will be accepted in pilot for the third time. A pilot

will be conducted for supplements for the first time in February/March or June/July 2005. Jennifer stated that eCGAP would one day like to pilot an RFA (Request for Announcements) electronically. Melissa Stick wondered if eRA was concerned about the high number of applications that they may receive once they go live. Jennifer said they were gearing up to receive at least 100 applications. Brent Stanfield noted that while the field out there includes about 6,000 applications, most institutions are not prepared to submit electronically. He stated he would be disappointed if they got less than 100 applications in production.

*Task orders*—eRA has awarded a contract to Science Applications International Corporation (SAIC) for the design and development of enhancements to eCGAP. Another task order has been awarded to AC Technologies, Inc. to evaluate exchanges for adding new capabilities. After AC Technologies makes its recommendation, eRA will decide whether to buy or build. AC Technologies is also evaluating software for the ebXML (electronic business XML) technology standard that eCGAP plans to adopt for registering trading partners and for secure messaging.

*Grants.gov*—Grants.gov is the government wide Internet portal for grant information and submissions; a single access point for grant applications from 26 Federal Agencies. It is a program being run in partnership with 11 federal agencies and managed by the U.S. Department of Health and Human Services. NIH has only used Grants.gov so far for accepting grant applications for the NIH Director's Pioneer Awards. Currently, NIH eRA is developing a system-to-system interface between NIH and Grants.gov. Tom Tatham wondered if Service Providers will eventually have to go through Grants.gov. Jennifer said that is indeed what she is hearing. David Wright noted that that will be the case only for competing grant applications.

*398 vs 424*—The NIH competitive grant form is on a PHS 398 form, while the grant application form approved by the Office of Management and Budget for federal use is form 424 Research & Related (RR). Jennifer stated that as a way of integrating with Grants.gov, eRA will transition from the 398 to the 424 RR and NIH specific forms, including some information in the 424 that is required in the 398s but is not part of the 424s. Those forms will be finalized by January 2005. eRA plans to conduct an initial test with Grants.gov in March using dead data before accepting live applications. Jennifer noted that grantees are reluctant to submit applications in a new setting from the get go; they need to be comfortable in that environment. eCGAP is working both internally and externally to get people attuned to the culture change that comes with a move from paper to electronic.

*Outreach*—The eRA office of Planning, Communications and Outreach is planning the fourth annual eRA symposium Dec. 2 that will focus on electronic receipt of applications. The symposium will run from 8 a.m. to 1 p.m. at the Natcher Conference Center on NIH's Main Campus in Bethesda. The symposium will include an array of speakers. Service Providers have been invited to display their products and services.

As part of their continued outreach effort, eRA has developed an applicant orientation package (http://era.nih.gov/Projectmgmt/SBIR/files/Participant_Package_06-21-04a.pdf) and posted answers to questionnaires given to Service Providers on the eRA web site (http://era.nih.gov/Projectmgmt/SBIR/sbir_grants.htm) as a way of informing the public about eCGAP. eRA is also assisting Service Providers through postings on the newly revamped Partnership Information page (http://era.nih.gov/Projectmgmt/SBIR/) on eRA's web site.

*Future changes*—eCGAP proposes to:

- expand types of grants to SBIR/STTR (Small Business Technology Research), Training, Fellowships, complex program grants and others

- phase out printing

- enable new transactions such as PPF (Professional Profile) update and Financial Status Reports (FSR)

- Handle corrections and additions to applications after receipt.

## Open Discussion

*Grant Image*—Brent noted that applicants are most concerned that they are at a disadvantage with an electronic image of their application when it comes to peer review. However, he stated that the grant image is usually better than the scanned image. Reviewers are now provided with paper images in addition to the electronic version. Eventually the reviewers may grow accustomed to the electronic image and not require a paper copy. Brent stated that he would like to see the possibility of reviewers then getting a paper copy only if they ask for it — as a way of weaning them from paper.

*Electronic/paper option*—Brent raised the issue of how long should eCGAP continue the policy of allowing an applicant to submit his or her grant on paper if he or she reviews the application online and is not satisfied with the electronic submission of the grant. This issue has to be handled diplomatically—eCGAP does not want people to revert to paper and yet it does not want to put up barriers for applicants. In some cases, applicants use the excuse of not being satisfied with the electronic submission as a way to gain an extra two weeks to resubmit their application. Janna Wehrle asked if all Service Providers and Grants.gov provide a preview of the application to applicants. Service Providers do allow the applicant to view the application online; Grants.gov does not permit business validation upfront but leaves it to the agencies. Wehrle stated that if applicants are allowed that preview capability, they should not be accommodated any further.

*Certification for Service Providers*—One group member asked if eRA had established standards for Service Providers. Jennifer responded that eRA is setting up the certification process and the necessary tools to support it. Currently, Service Providers have to submit a test application of a particular type successfully in the test environment before eRA allows them to proceed in submitting that type of application in production.

*Pricing*—Sandy Karen asked if eRA would regulate pricing by Service Providers. Jennifer responded that NIH is not regulating pricing. The market will automatically determine pricing.

*Helpdesk*—Valerie Prenger wondered if eRA planned to increase support for the Helpdesk. Jennifer responded that eRA was having ongoing discussions on plans to beef up the Helpdesk, given the increase in submission of applications anticipated for eCGAP and Grants.gov.

*Archiving*—Melissa Stick asked that if supplemental material is allowed after the submission of a grant application, how does one ensure which is the official file? Brent stated that it would have to be defined at the policy level. Jennifer stated that eCGAP will not erase anything and will

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maintain different versions. It will also make it easy to navigate from the most recent to the original application.

*Future Presentations*—Janna Wehrle requested a short presentation on changes made to Peer Review and Receipt & Referral modules. Sara Silver, eCGAP and CGAPRR requirements analyst, stated that she would schedule one for the group's next meeting. George Moyer requested Jennifer give a presentation on eCGAP to a select group of the External Review Committee at the Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality as a way of perking up interest in eCGAP and acquainting AHRQ staffers with its intricacies.

**Action:** **(Sara Silver) Demonstrate at next meeting the changes made to Peer Review and Receipt and Referral modules.**

**Action:** **(Jennifer Flach) Make an eCGAP presentation to a select group of the External Review Committee at the Agency for Healthcare Research & Quality (AHRQ).**

## Attendees

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| Flach, Jennifer (OER) | Myers, Chris (NIDCD) | Stick, Melissa (NIDCD) |
| George, David (NIBIB) | Myrbeck, Edward (NIAMS) | Swain, Amy (NCRR) |
| Liberman, Ellen (NEI) | Panniers, Richard (CSR) | Subramanya, Manju (LTS) |
| Long, Kelly (HRSA) | Prenger, Valerie (NHLBI) | Tatham, Thomas (CSR) |
| Karen, Sandy (HRSA) | Silver, Sara (OER) | Wehrle, Janna (NIGMS) |
| Moyer, George (Skip) (AHRQ) | Stanfield, Brent (CSR) | Wright, David (OD) |