



## eCGAP Focus Group

---

**Date:** Tuesday, November 16, 2004  
**Time:** 9:00 –11:00 a.m.  
**Location:** Rockledge 1, Room 2198  
**Moderator:** Jennifer Flach

**Next Meeting:** Tuesday, December 7, 9:00 a.m.–11:00 a.m., Rockledge 1, RM 2198

---

### Action Items

1. (eCGAP Team, Communications branch) Develop a single sheet of frequently asked questions about electronic submission of grants that NIH staff can refer to or distribute.
2. (eCGAP technical team) Follow up with the Service Providers to find out why some applications were rejected by the PI/SO in the October/November pilot.
3. (eCGAP Team) Give applicants for Feb. 1 receipt date until Feb. 4 to verify. For those who revert to paper, their applications need to be received by NIH by Feb. 9. Give applicants for Mar. 1 receipt date until Mar. 4 to verify. For those who revert to paper, their applications need to be received by NIH by Wednesday Mar. 9.
4. (eCGAP Team) Term the process of opening up eCGAP for submission of simple modular R01, R03 and R21 grant applications in January as “open submission” rather than “production.”
5. (Sara Silver) Compile list of application volume received for each grant type, so group can use it as a guide for determining priorities.
6. (eCGAP Team) Compile a list of priorities for eCGAP and the eRA eXchange based on this discussion. Solicit input from Commons Working Group and Service Providers and incorporate into a running list of priorities.
7. (Sara Silver) Compile a list of institutions that submit grant applications, so the group can prioritize based on what would be helpful to those applicants.
8. (All) Review draft purpose statement for eCGAP Focus Group and suggest changes, if any.
9. (All) Send availability for regular eCGAP Focus Group meetings to Manju Subramanya

### Update on October/November pilots

*Jennifer Flach*

Twenty grant applications were received electronically during the latest eCGAP pilot that ended Friday (Nov. 12), of which one was rejected. The eCGAP team will follow up with the Service Provider to find out why. Twenty-six applications came in for the previous receipt date of

October 1. Tom Tatham asked if the Service Providers had given an estimate of how many applicants they expected to bring in for the February 1 receipt date. Jennifer noted that the Service Providers are still in pilot mode and will be recruiting new applicants later. She stated that she would quiz the Service Providers on that during the eCGAP conference call with them this week. During previous pilots, the Service Providers have always fallen short of what they estimated. Given that trend, she did not expect a huge number of applicants in February. Brent Stanfield and Israel Lederhendler would like to see a minimum of 100 applicants. Richard Panniers asked how the Service Providers go about recruiting new applicants. Jennifer stated that it was through mass mailings, booths at regional meetings and networking. JJ Maurer noted that some people were nervous about trying out the new electronic submission method and therefore it is necessary to get the word out to people. Tom Tatham suggested that a single sheet of frequently asked questions distributed to program and other staffers would help. The group noted that it was a good idea.

**Action: (eCGAP team, Communications staff) Develop a single sheet of frequently asked questions about electronic submission of grants that NIH staff can refer to or distribute.**

**Action: (eCGAP technical team) Follow up with Service Providers to find out why some applications were rejected by the PI/SO in the October/November pilot**

## **Schedule for production for February/March Receipt dates**

*Jennifer Flach*

Suzanne Fisher noted that for the Nov. 1 receipt date, applicants had until Nov. 12 to complete their applications. When eCGAP begins production for the Feb. 1 receipt date, she noted that applicants should not be given so much time; February 1 applicants should be verified and complete by Feb. 3. Jennifer responded that the idea was to give applicants time to adapt to the new method of submitting grants since they have a steep learning curve. Melissa Stick asked how much time did the Principal Investigator and Signing Official have after submission to verify. Suzanne noted that the clock starts ticking after they submit and get their ticket; normally 24 to 48 hours after eCGAP processing. Suzanne noted that applicants have an opportunity to test many times before they submit their application. Dealing with the applications later and later has been a nightmare for Receipt and Referral. She noted that they should not harbor any delays in production, nor should applicants be given the opportunity to reject their electronic submission of the grant and revert to paper. While these concessions are okay in a pilot phase, they should not be allowed in production. Jennifer noted that with tighter deadlines, they are likely to see fewer applicants. The flip side is that eRA does want to encourage applicants to try electronic submission. The question remains — how does one make the environment comfortable for a Principal Investigator coming in for the first time and at the same time process the application in a timely manner? JJ Maurer stated that the concessions should be taken away in increments. He suggested that they could ratchet back the deadline but not take away the option of reverting to paper submission; otherwise it would discourage applicants who are fearful of electronic submission. Melissa Stick noted that there were too many safety nets and at some point, they needed to be taken away. JJ Maurer noted that of the 20 applications that came in for the November pilot, only one applicant reverted to paper. Suzanne stated that it was an issue of

fairness; for people submitting by paper, a Feb. 1 receipt date is a Feb. 1 receipt date—there is no leeway. Sara Silver pointed out that in submitting electronically, the team is asking applicants to take a risk. The group agreed that for the February 1 receipt date, the applications should come in that day while the verification should be completed by Friday, February 4. The applicants would still have the option of reverting to a paper application if they were unhappy with the grant image; those paper applications are to be received by Wednesday, February 9.

**Action: (eCGAP Team) Give applicants for Feb. 1 receipt date until Feb. 4 to verify. For those who revert to paper, their applications need to be received by NIH by Feb. 9. Give applicants for Mar. 1 receipt date until Mar. 4 to verify. For those who revert to paper, their applications need to be received by NIH by Wednesday Mar. 9.**

*Production or pilot*—Suzanne stated that she felt strongly that if applicants are getting concessions in terms of extra time and the option to revert to paper, eRA should not label the process of opening up eCGAP for submission of simple modular R01, R03 and R21 grant applications in January as “opening up production.” JJ Maurer stated that there is no question that having conducted three pilots, the software is ready for production. Jennifer noted that in the three pilots, the system had been running with back-ups. When there were problems, the eCGAP Team would work one on one with Service Providers to iron out the difficulties. However, come Feb. 1, the system would be open to anyone and therefore, one could call it production. Valerie Prenger stated that any bending of deadlines or lifting of restrictions cannot be termed production. Sara Silver noted that the team is trying to get the number of electronic applications up and to achieve that, has to resort to a bait and switch method. Suzanne stated that rather than “production,” the process should be labeled as “open submission.” She stated that terming it as “full production” would be misleading. Janna Wehrle stated that the word “open” carries a lot of positive connotations. Jennifer noted that one has to address the fears of the PIs before one can pitch electronic submission to them. Janna noted that no sales pitch would work unless the PI has tried the electronic submission process and successfully gone through it. The group agreed to call the process “open submission” rather than production. However, JJ cautioned that NIH should stand behind the process; if they label it as an experiment, it will remain one.

**Action: (eCGAP Team) Term the process of opening up eCGAP for submission of simple modular R01, R03 and R21 grant applications in January as “open submission” rather than “production.”**

## **High-level priorities for eCGAP and eRA eXchange**

*Jennifer Flach*

Jennifer stated that the eCGAP team had so far concentrated on developing simple, popular mechanisms. Now the team needs to expand the types of applications it takes in and wants feedback from the group on prioritizing future enhancements. Currently:

- eCGAP accepts simple modular R01s, R03s and R21s but has restrictions on consortiums.
- It is piloting full budget applications for R01s, R03s and R21s.
- The team recently developed and is testing software to allow applicants to submit supplements, although that is not yet ready for piloting.
- eCGAP can handle responses to Request For Applications (RFAs) and Program Announcements (PAs) for the above types of mechanisms.

- In terms of developing grant-related transactions, the team is developing the ability to send an electronic Notice of Grant Award (NGA), marking the first outgoing transaction from the eRA eXchange. The functionality for the NGA is being developed and should take a couple of months. JJ Maurer noted that Service Providers would be able to download this data into their grants management database. This feature had been listed as a priority by the Commons Working Group; Jennifer noted that she was looking for similar guidance from this group.

***Expand types of grant mechanisms and related capabilities***

- Small Business Innovation Research/Small Business Technology Transfer (SBIR/STTR)
- Training
- Fellowships
- AREA grants (Academic Research Enhancement Award)
- Complex program grants and subprojects
- Principal Investigator (PI) change of institution
- IC and Study Section requests
- Control receipt dates
- Expand appendix capabilities
- Others (examples are U's, other R's, S, LRP applications)

**Discussion:**

- Suzanne Fisher stated that 'consortium arrangements' or 'subprojects' are reasonably common and should be high on the list. She noted that NIH is really pushing cooperative research and this would fit in very well. [Consortium agreements are a collaborative arrangement in support of a research project in which part of an activity is carried out through a formal agreement between a grantee and one or more organizations. Source: NIAID Glossary of Funding and Policy Terms]
- Valerie Prenger suggested moving up the 'expand appendix capabilities' before 'complex program grants'. Complex grants almost always include bulky appendixes and if the appendix part is already built in, eCGAP will have less trouble selling the idea to the outside community. Suzanne agreed but noted that consortiums should be in place.
- Suzanne stated that Academic Research Enhancement Award (AREA) applications are a small piece of the pie, averaging about 800 a year, and therefore should be a low priority. They are sent in by small schools that would be ideal for Service Providers to tap, although the schools may not have a lot of money to pay them. Michael Goodman noted that one Service Provider, Formatta Corp. of Herndon, Va., was pushing that type of grant.
- Suzanne stated that she had mixed feelings about SBIR grant applications. However, the number of SBIR applications submitted annually are huge. These applications come in at a rate of 2,500 or 3,000 every round, making for 10,000 or more applications every year.
- Mike Goodman noted that the SF424 Research and Related (R&R) data set does not currently handle SBIR-specific elements. It is slated for the next release of the 424 R&R.

- David George suggested that the number of applications that come in for each mechanism could be used as a guide for the group to determine priorities. Sara Silver noted that she would compile a list showing the number of applications received for each grant type.
- Sara noted that regarding IC & Study Section requests, the team is considering having the cover letter come in as structured data, instead of having a complicated cover letter as they currently do. Tom Tatham suggested that change should be high on the list. Valerie Prenger asked how eCGAP would handle applications delayed because of a death. Tom stated that it would be the same as when a natural disaster struck – they would be given an extension.
- One member stated that training grant mechanisms should be lower on the list because most ICs would have put them in the January Council round, for which the deadline that has already passed. The next round of funding does not begun until next summer. However, Sara noted that it takes time to develop these grant mechanisms. Something like SBIRs for instance, would take months to develop.
- Suzanne stated that the ‘PI change of Institution’ request is rare and does not affect a lot of transactions. Sara noted that even with rare requests, one may want to work these in if it is not difficult to incorporate.
- As for the Loan Repayment Program (LRP) applications, they have developed their own electronic receipt. Sara noted that LRPs come in from individuals, not from Service Providers. However, Sara noted that adding LRP applications to eCGAP is simply a workload issue. Currently, the applications come in electronically to the LRP system and the 398 forms are printed and sent to Suzanne Fisher’s office. It would be relatively easy to incorporate that feature into eCGAP. JJ noted that the intention is to use eRA as a hub for all internal transactions.

**Action: (Sara Silver) Compile list of applications received for each grant type, so group can use it as a guide for determining priorities.**

*New transactions*

- PPF (Professional Profile) update
- IPF (Institutional Profile) update
- Financial Status Report (FSR)
- electronic Streamlined Non-competing Award Process (eSNAP)
- eNAP
- Population tracking
- Others

**Discussion:**

- JJ Maurer stated that PPF is high on the list because that information has to be currently retyped in Commons.
- Janna Wehrle stated that she wanted to make a pitch for Population Tracking – that would allow institutions to update the information whenever they got the data instead of less frequently.

Jennifer stated that her team would compile a priority list based on this discussion and get feedback from the Commons Working Group and Service Providers. Based on the priorities, the team would draw up schedules and develop requirements. Janna suggested that the team provide

the group with a list of institutions that submit grant applications so that the group could then prioritize based on what would be helpful to those applicants. Sara stated that she could compile such a list.

**Action: (eCGAP Team) Compile a list of priorities for eCGAP and the eRA eXchange based on this discussion. Solicit input from Commons Working Group and Service Providers and incorporate into a running list of priorities.**

**Action: (Sara Silver) Compile a list of institutions that submit grant applications, so the group can prioritize based on what would be helpful to those applicants.**

## Focus Group purpose

([http://era.nih.gov/docs/draft\\_eCGAP\\_focus\\_group\\_purpose\\_statement.pdf](http://era.nih.gov/docs/draft_eCGAP_focus_group_purpose_statement.pdf))

Jennifer distributed a draft Focus Group purpose statement and urged members to review it and suggest revisions, if any, at the next meeting.

**Action: (All) Review draft purpose statement for eCGAP Focus Group and suggest changes, if any.**

## Table Talk

*Stopping paper notices*—Suzanne asked at what point will they stop sending paper notices about grant application assignments to people who submit electronically. Sara noted that it is in the works; the reason it was not stopped is that the team ran into a problem with e-notification and did not want to yank the paper letter when e-notification was not working.

*Pinning down a date for a standing meeting*— Jennifer stated that a regular time slot for the eCGAP Focus Group needs to be pinned down. One group member suggested that all members send their availability for a regular meeting to Manju Subramanya and the meetings will be held in the time slot convenient to most members.

**Action: (All): Send availability for regular eCGAP Focus Group meeting to Manju Subramanya**

**Update:** A majority of the members polled chose Tuesday as their first choice. The first eCGAP meeting of the month will be held on the first Tuesday of each month from 9 a.m. to 11 a.m.. The second meeting will be held on the third Monday of each month from 1:30 p.m. to 3:30 p.m.

## Attendees

Fisher, Suzanne (CSR)	Karen, Sandy (HRSA)	Prenger, Valerie (NHLBI)
Flach, Jennifer (OER)	Maurer, JJ (OD)	Silver, Sara (OER)
George, David (NIBIB)	Myers, Chris (NIDCD)	Stick, Melissa (NIDCD)
Goodman, Michael (OD)	Myrbeck, Edward (NIAMS)	Swain, Amy (NCRR)
Liberman, Ellen (NEI)	Panniers, Richard (CSR)	Subramanya, Manju (LTS/OD)
Long, Kelly (HRSA)		

Tatham, Thomas (CSR)

Wehrle, Janna (NIGMS)