

# PDF Guidelines for HSR&D Proposals

05/18/2006

## Overview

The wide variety of source documents, versions of Adobe Acrobat, and experience creating optimized PDFs makes this a difficult process to standardize in a "one-size-fits-all" manner. However, there are some general rules and concepts to the process that should make it go smoothly and with the desired results:

- The end product should be a PDF of sufficient quality to be easy to read in print or on screen, and has a file size small enough to be easily transmitted electronically by web upload (preferably < 4MB)
- Source documents in MS Word (or other text editor) format make the best PDFs. They have the smallest file sizes and the highest quality, and support free-text searches.
- Scanned documents are unavoidable – signed forms, letters, etc. – but should be kept to a minimum. Just like images, scanned documents cannot be compressed or searched, must have large file sizes to ensure good enough quality to read, and will result in very large and sub-standard quality PDF proposals.
- NIH has standard guidelines for creating PDFs that provide some good tips and ideas.  
[http://era.nih.gov/ElectronicReceipt/pdf\\_guidelines.htm](http://era.nih.gov/ElectronicReceipt/pdf_guidelines.htm) (for reference only)

## Source Document Types

See the appendix for an example of the fillable PDF form that requires special treatment. The rest of the following document types will convert automatically:

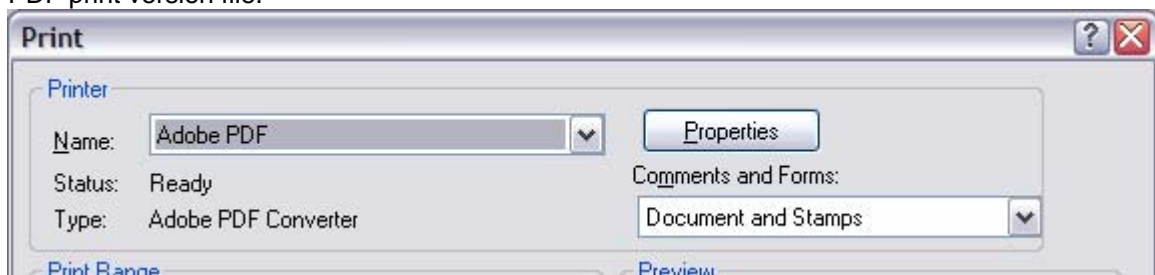
- MS Word / Text files
- Scanned documents (in PDF or TIFF format)
- New fillable PDF forms (see appendix)
- Older fillable PDFs and other general PDFs
- Protected MS Word Forms (causes warning, but can be ignored)

## Getting Started

- Make sure you have the most recent updates for your version of Adobe Acrobat. For Acrobat 7 (Std or Professional), you should have **Version 7.0.7**. If you are using Acrobat on a Windows PC, directly access the Acrobat update page here:  
<http://www.adobe.com/support/downloads/product.jsp?product=1&platform=Windows>
- Collect all electronic copies of your source files – the files that will be combined and converted to make up the eProposal – and **<IMPORTANT> carefully archive a copy of each**. When performing the conversions, make sure you have original copies stored in a different location.
- If you are using an earlier version of Acrobat (6 or 5) contact Charlie Festel at [charles.festel@va.gov](mailto:charles.festel@va.gov) for special instructions.

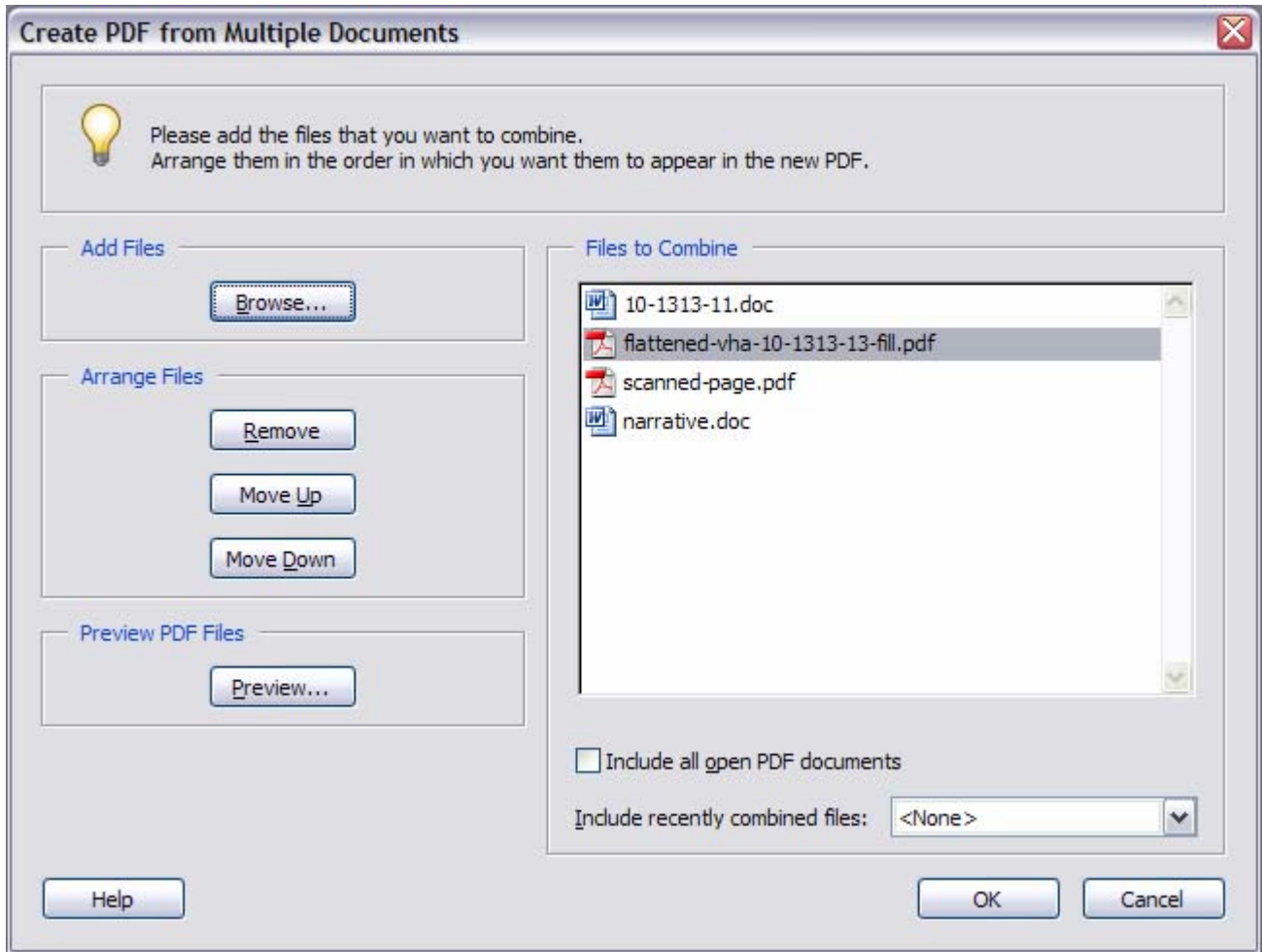
## Guidelines for Creating PDFs

- 1) Prepare all source documents.
  - a) Store original copies in a separate directory
  - b) If Fillable PDFs are included, you must disable the editable fields by following these steps (from item 7 in the NIH instructions):
    - i) Go to **File**, click on **Print** and select the output device for printing to **Adobe PDF** to create an Adobe PDF print version file.



- ii) Use the Adobe PDF print version of the file, not the original editable version.

- 2) By far, the easiest way to create the PDF is to use the “Create PDF from Multiple Files” function of Acrobat 7. This requires that you have all of your source documents prepared and ready to use. Once they are ready, open Acrobat and access the wizard from the main toolbar: **File --> Create PDF --> From Multiple Files**. Click the **Browse** button and select the source files you wish to add to the PDF.



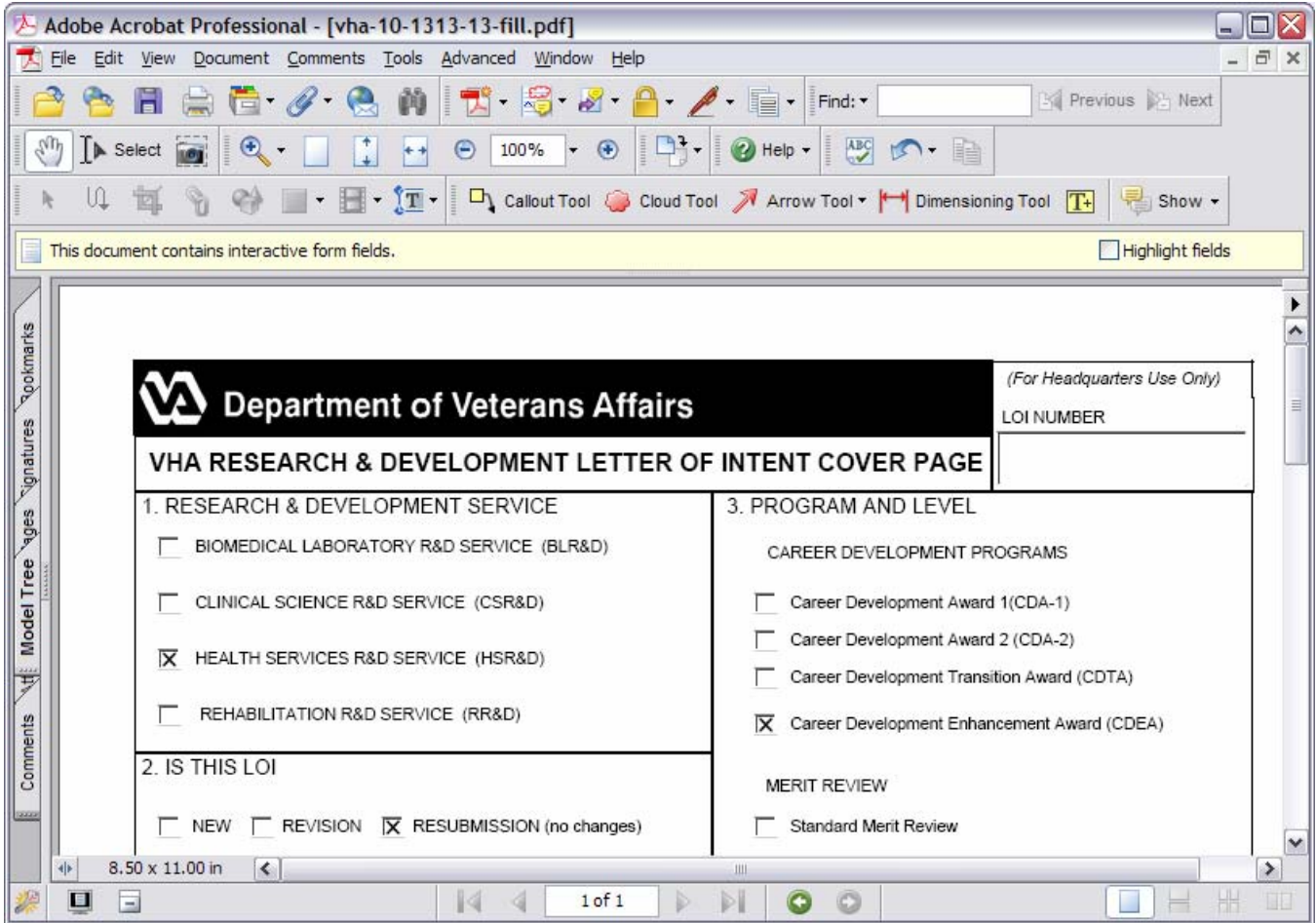
- 3) Once all the source files are selected, use the “Arrange Files” buttons in the dialog to sort the files in the order you wish them to be when the final document is created. Refer to “Table of Contents” (paragraph C.1.) in “Detailed Instructions for Preparing a Merit Review Application”.
- 4) Click “OK”
- 5) Acrobat will proceed with converting and combining all the files. If one of the files happens to be a protected MS Word form, you will see the following warning:



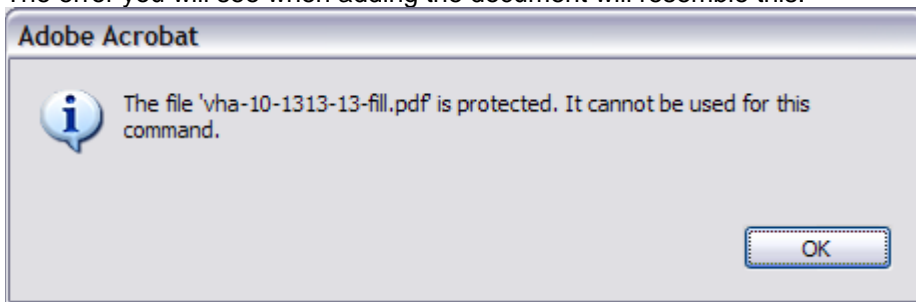
- Click “Yes” to proceed. It will not impact the final product.
- 6) Finally, name the new PDF file in the following format:  
**If resubmission** – LastName\_FirstName\_ProjectID.pdf  
**If new submission (no ProjectID)** – LastName\_FirstName.pdf

# Appendix

This is a screenshot of a new Fillable PDF. Some forms on the VA Forms site are now using this technology, and they cannot be combined into a normal PDF without following the directions provided in the Guidelines. If you try to add one of these forms in the “Create From Multiple Files” wizard, it will generate an error and tell you which file won’t work.



The error you will see when adding the document will resemble this:



There are some older types of fillable PDFs available on the ORD website that will work fine in this process. They are distinguishable by the hashed lines surrounding the form fields. (see below) No special processing is necessary to include these in the Multiple File wizard.

The image shows a screenshot of Adobe Acrobat Professional displaying a PDF form titled "MERIT REVIEW APPLICATION" from the Department of Veterans Affairs. The form is contained within a window titled "Adobe Acrobat Professional - [10-1313-1\_edit.pdf]". The interface includes a menu bar (File, Edit, View, Document, Comments, Tools, Advanced, Window, Help), a toolbar with various navigation and editing tools, and a status bar at the bottom showing "1 of 1". A yellow banner at the top of the document area states "This document contains interactive form fields." with a "Highlight fields" checkbox. The form itself is a structured application with the following sections:

- Department of Veterans Affairs** logo and title.
- 1. LAB NO.** (empty field)
- 2. APPLICATION NO.** (empty field)
- 3. REVIEW GROUP** (empty field)
- 4. REVIEW DATE** (mm/dd/yyyy)
- 5. FACILITY NO.** (empty field)
- 6. LOCATION HEALTH CARE FACILITY (VAMC, OPC, CITY, STATE)** (empty field)
- 7. SOCIAL SECURITY NO.** (empty field)
- 8. DATE OF LAST SUBMISSION - MR** (mm/dd/yyyy)
- 9. PRINCIPAL INVESTIGATOR(S) (Last Name, First Name, M.I.)** (empty field)
- DEGREE** (empty field)
- TELEPHONE NUMBER(S)** (empty field)
- 10. PROGRAM TITLE (72 Characters maximum)** (empty field)
- 11. AMOUNT REQUESTED EACH YEAR** (empty field)
- 1ST** (empty field), **2ND** (empty field), **3RD** (empty field), **4TH** (empty field), **5TH** (empty field), **TOTAL** (empty field)
- 12. VA EMPLOYMENT STATUS** (checkboxes for FULL TIME)
- 13. VA SALARY SOURCE** (checkboxes for RESEARCH CC 103, PATIENT CARE)
- 14. TYPE PROGRAM** (checkboxes for NEW)