NIH eRA Commons Working Group (CWG)

Date/Time:	Friday, January 13, 2006, 1–5:00 p.m.
Location:	The National Academy of Sciences Building, 2100 C St. N.W., Washington, D.C.
Chair:	David Wright
Next Meeting:	May 2006, Seattle, Washington

Action Items

1. (Scarlett Gibb) Add to application instructions the need for a correct affiliation, how to get affiliated and how to change affiliation.

2. (Megan Columbus) Investigate the feasibility of allowing appendices to be an upload in JIT instead of with the application itself.

3. (Jen Flach) Investigate combining emails sent by NIH so that the email is sent to the PI, SO and the institution business office.

4. (Jen Flach) Investigate the possibility of including the trigger date that starts the 2-day verification period in the email letter to the submitter.

5. (Scarlett Gibb) Investigate best way to identify related applications even if the title changes.

6. (Scarlett Gibb) Explore the possibility of PI delegation for approval/rejection of electronic submissions.

7. (Megan Columbus) Communicate information about the tools available on the Commons to universities and the CWG members.

8. (Scarlett Gibb) Develop training materials to be used with the training demo that clearly show the PI and SO/AOR roles in the process.

9. (All) Send suggestions for notification changes and improvements to Scarlett Gibb.

10. (Megan Columbus) Post public version of the "lessons learned" analysis of the December submission, when available.

11. (Marcia Hahn) Investigate the possibility of using a generic CFDA number of 9300 for all NIH applications.

12. (Megan Columbus) Investigate segmenting the SF424 (R&R) training videocast so that each presentation could be shown separately.

13. (Scarlett Gibb) Investigate the timeout and number of users/scalability issues in regard to the Citrix solution for electronic submission for Macintosh users.

14. (All) Send any Citrix Tips & Tricks to Megan Columbus.

15. (Megan Columbus) Take the issue of switching the application deadline to local time instead of Eastern Standard Time to the NIH for consideration.

Presentations

- *Commons Updates* presented by Scarlett Gibb: http://era.nih.gov/Docs/CommonsUpdate_Gibb_01-13-06.pdf

- *Submission Dates—Opportunity for Change of Chaos?* presented by Suzanne Fisher: http://era.nih.gov/Docs/SubmissionDates_Fisher_01-13-06.pdf

Welcome

David Wright welcomed CWG members to the meeting. He announced that he has started a new job as the director of the Federal Demonstration Project as of this week. David introduced Scarlett Gibb, branch chief of the Office of Research Information Services User Support, as the new CWG liaison.

He also announced that CWG member Ellen Beck has retired. He welcomed Kellie Guentert from the University of California at Davis who has replaced Ellen.

Commons Update

Scarlett Gibb

Scarlett reviewed Commons Release 2.7.3. Several changes were implemented: a URL security filter; Grant Folder to IAR, which now includes electronic applications and appendices; fixed formatting problems with eSNAP and FSR; and fixed the JIT problem of not letting eSNAPs be submitted for grants with exempted human subject usage.

Two releases are scheduled with most of the changes taking place in the backend and transparent to users. A patch for 2.7.3 will include items to streamline the organization registration and other changes based on input from the first SBIR electronic submission. Release 2.7.4 will include upgrading the Oracle Application Server to 10G and a solution for retrieving manuscript citations from NIHMS.

X-Train and Organizational Hierarchy

Deployment for X-Train and Organizational Hierarchy has been delayed until summer because several projects took precedence, including changes for electronic submission and the multiple Principal Investigator release. Additionally, Organizational Hierarchy requires updates to several applications within eRA (e.g., Receipt & Referral). eRA is in the midst of moving all its applications/modules from client-server to J2EE architecture, which is another complication.

Discussion

- Mary Gonzales, representing Grants.gov, will investigate the problem with the Central Contractor Registry (CCR) process invalidating the Grants.gov registration.

- Will there be a problem if a PI hasn't been verified before submitting an application? As long as there is a clear profile for the PI in the eRA Commons (not several different ones) there shouldn't be a problem. The PI must have an active Commons account to see their applications. Additionally, special attention should be made to ensure that the correct affiliation is listed with the application.

Action: **(Scarlett Gibb) Add to application instructions the need for a correct affiliation, how to get affiliated and how to change affiliation.**

- There has been a problem with a negative institutional profile file (IPF) code and the development team is investigating the cause. This seems to occur when a PI uploads a Just-In-Time (JIT) document and it doesn't seem to link to the institution. The PI can manually enter JIT information but the Signing Official (SO) can't see it. Scarlett noted that JIT is scheduled to be upgraded.

- Suggestion: Think about allowing appendices to applications to be uploaded as JIT documents. Of course, links to publications in the appendix rather than attached documents are ideal but this can't always be done. Uploading them in JIT would reduce the load of the application itself.

Action: **(Megan Columbus) Investigate the feasibility of allowing appendices to be an upload in JIT instead of with the application itself.**

Electronic Submission

Megan Columbus

Megan asked for input regarding communication strategies so that better understanding of electronic submission can be disseminated throughout the grantee community. What would work to penetrate institutions?

Discussion

- **Brochures**—The brochures are not targeted well for PIs, according to one member. He asked that each brochure panel be available so that institutions can mix and match and add specific contact information for their offices. Soon a one-page flyer will be available on the Web site that can be more easily modified.

- **Key contacts**—Megan introduced key contact people (besides herself) for electronic submission:
  - *Sheri Cummins*—communications and system-to-system questions
  - *Vicki Fadeley*—works with developers on the Commons
  - *Dan Fox*—requirements analyst
  - *Sally Rockey*—deputy director, Office of Extramural Research

- Guide notes are well done.

- Suggest establishing a self-subscribe listserv, which could be used to send out announcements. Perhaps there could be two: one for faculty and one for administrators.

- Suggest note and link to common errors in applications on the eRA Commons homepage. This should be posted during the week of the deadline.

- It's difficult to find information on the Electronic Submission Web site. Information is not clearly titled. Need to have clearer pointers on the Tips & Tools page for the validation/error list.

- Working groups are investigating better ways to group and communicate information.

- Need to make clearer that only institutions need to register with Grants.gov.

Verification Process

Today, Signing Officials (SO) and Principal Investigators (PI) have to click a button in eRA Commons to verify an application within a two-day window before it can move on to Receipt & Referral. Since Grants.gov requires authentication of the Authorized Organization Representative (our Signing Official), removing the SO verification step is easy. However, the Office of Policy for Extramural Research Administration is revisiting the need for PI signature with the Inspector General and the Justice Department. With approval, eRA will implement "passive verification." This would mean that once an application makes it through electronic acceptance, the SO and PI would have two days to stop the application. If they don't stop it (do nothing), the application automatically would move on in the process. The passive verification will no longer hold the legal significance of SO and PI signature.

As proposed, during the two-day stop period, there would be a window for the PI to 1) approve and move forward and 2) Reject. However, if neither choice is clicked, the application would move on after the waiting period.

Marcia Hahn said that the compliance staff required a signature on the PHS 398. Times have changed and it is believed that other legal verifications will take the place of this signature, thus allowing this "passive verification."

Discussion

- There was some interest in finding a way to combine the notification emails that currently are sent separately to SOs and PIs. One suggestion was that one email should be sent to the PI and the SO with the business office copied. In general, anyone that needs to take action should be in the "TO" line.

Action: **(Jen Flach) Investigate combining emails sent by NIH so that the email is sent to the PI, SO and the institution business office.**

- It was difficult to figure out where to send the letter saying why the application was late. That information should be in the cover letter. Receipt & Referral only sees the latest (of multiple) cover letters.

- Cover letters have to be sent any time you resubmit an application even if it is before the deadline and before Grants.gov approves.

Action: **(Jen Flach) Investigate the possibility of including the trigger date that starts the 2-day verification period in the email letter to the submitter.**

- In Status on the Commons, the list of submitted applications includes duplicate (multiple) applications. This makes it very difficult to sort out the final one. NIH is planning to show only the latest application in Status with a link to history.

- When there are multiple submissions of the same application because of errors, the errors are referenced by the title of the application. However, sometimes the title changes so this may not work.

Action: **(Scarlett Gibb) Investigate the best way to identify related applications even if the title changes.**

- If the PI verifies the application within the 2-day period, an email should be sent to the SO.

- When the passive verification is implemented, the only way to stop an application from continuing the process is to hit the Reject button during the verification period. The group would like any PI and SO to be able to reject or move the application forward.

- The ability for the PI to delegate verification is closely linked to the Organization Hierarchy that is scheduled to be released this summer. This could make it possible for the PI to delegate the verification—move forward or reject the application.

Action: **(Scarlett Gibb) Explore the possibility of PI delegation for approval/rejection of electronic submissions.**

- The Organizational Hierarchy also will allow SOs to see all PIs. PIs will be able to delegate someone to update their profiles and enter information into eSNAP. It won't resolve all delegation issues but NIH has split rights for particular roles so that they can be assigned to different people. Although the Organizational Hierarchy project has been on the table for a couple of years, it can't be implemented until the internal modules are updated to J2EE.

- Many universities don't have the capability for multiple PIs in their systems. It will be a few years before they will be able to implement this.

- It is important that there be training on the tools available on the eRA Commons before the October 1 deadline for R01s.

Action: **(Megan Columbus) Communicate information about the tools available on the Commons to universities and the CWG members.**

- There will be a training demo at the end of March for users to practice submitting applications through Grants.gov using PureEdge™ forms and for institutions to use for training. The applications will be the small business applications since they are the only ones that have switched to the SF424 (R&R) form. It will not be a secure site so those using it should not use proprietary data when filling out the applications.

  Although there are many applications with which to practice with on AT Web, Grants.gov does not want a large training volume going through AT Web. Therefore, it's better to use the NIH training site.

  Suggestion: The process should include the PI filling out the application, sending it to the SO, and the SO verifying, submitting and verifying. It must be designed so the PI cannot submit the application. If the PI wants to see what the SO does, the PI can take the SO training.

Action: **(Scarlett Gibb) Develop training materials to be used with the training demo that clearly show the PI and SO/AOR roles in the process.**

- Sometimes the verification notification email isn't clear as to the location of the application that needs to be verified. There needs to be some sort of tracking number at the institute that allows an easy match-up between notification email and actual application image to be verified.

- SOs and PIs want to know whether or not the application is valid, not valid and what the errors are. Jen Flach said that NIH is trying to be more liberal in its acceptance criteria. For example, allowing either ALL CAPS or upper/lowercase text.

- Scarlett Gibb is interested in which reports are needed to better manage the electronic submission process.

- Grants.gov is reworking notification messages to better communicate what actually is happening in the process. For example, the word "reviewed" has been replaced with "retrieved by the agency."

- For the Field Applicant Identifier field, attendees suggested that it be used for institutions to put their local ID for the applications. Then this field could be printed on the notification, thus making it easer to track and find.

- Once the application gets to the NIH, institutions would like to see the PI's name in the notification, preferably in the Subject line.

Action: **(All) Send suggestions for notification changes and improvements to Scarlett Gibb.**

Timeline

- It's important that institutions review their timelines and schedules to be sure that they can meet the electronic submission dates for the October 1 R01 submission date. There was a lot of discussion about whether or not to push out the October 1 switch date. Looking at university schedules, PIs have August off and then spend September getting their classes going. It will be difficult to have to deal also with electronic submission. Moving the date to February would alleviate this problem. Also, many institutions, especially smaller ones, will not have the electronic systems in place by the summer to accommodate electronic submission. However, many more would be ready by February. On the other hand, many thought that unless there is a show stopper, the date should not be changed. Their feeling was that the NIH needs to set the date and stick with it or it will never be taken seriously and institutions will continue to put off preparing for electronic submission. Also, much training has been delivered in anticipation of the October 1 date, which probably would have to be repeated if the date were pushed out. There was no consensus on this issue.

- There will be another small round of electronic submission in April that should give some indication as to whether the changes made from lessons learned from the first rounds will result in a smoother process. About 6,000 R01 applications are expected in October.

- The NIH will review lessons learned, community input, and pressures on the NIH to determine the final timeline.

Action: **(Megan Columbus) Post public version of the "lessons learned" analysis of the December submission, when available.**

CFDA Number

- Do not search by CFDA number in Grants.gov. Before November, the first CFDA of multiple numbers appear. After November, the field will be blank. NIH does not need the CFDA number for applications and assigns it after the award. Suggestion: use a generic CFDA number (93000) for all NIH applications.

Action: **(Marcia Hahn) Investigate the possibility of using a generic CFDA number of 9300 for all NIH applications.**

SF424 (R&R) Training

- The SF424 (R&R) training was videocast and is available on line. There was an interest in segmenting the videocast so that each section could be shown separately.

Action: **(Megan Columbus) Investigate segmenting the SF424 (R&R) training videocast so that each presentation could be shown separately.**

Citrix Solution for Mac Users

- Although the Citrix solution worked for Macintosh users, there were some issues that need to be addressed before the next round: timeout and number of users. The non-productivity timeout should be increased from 10 minutes to 30 minutes. The instance timeout also should be investigated, specifically looking at the memory issue. There is concern that with an increased number of applicants using Citrix, the system will be overloaded.

Action: **(Scarlett Gibb) Investigate the timeout and number of users/scalability issues in regard to the Citrix solution for electronic submission for Macintosh users.**

Megan is interested in acquiring any Citrix Tips & Tricks that CWG institutions have prepared.

Action: **(All) Send any Citrix Tips & Tricks to Megan Columbus.**

Application Deadline

- There was interest in changing the application deadline time from Eastern Time (ET) to local time. National Science Foundation went to this system, using a table with every school and its time zone, including daylight savings time. Ideally, the application deadline time should be standard across all government agencies.

Action: **(Megan Columbus) Take the issue of switching the application deadline to local time instead of Eastern Standard Time to the NIH for consideration.**

Submission Dates: Opportunity for Change or Chaos?

Suzanne Fisher

Now that electronic applications are a reality, it is time to reexamine the receipt date schedule. The distinction between submission and receipt dates will go away. Submission is done by 8 p.m. ET to Grants.gov with a 2-day verification period once the image is posted on the eRA Commons. Electronic submission provides an opportunity to spread out the dates by mechanism or other metric.

She presented some alternate schedules that are under consideration. Perhaps setting dates early for large applications (Ps) and applications with the largest volume (R01s) and giving more time to newer investigators (Ks, R03s) by setting those dates later would be more practicable. This would spread out work for investigators, institutions, Grants.gov and NIH (GrantsInfo, eXchange, Helpdesk, Referral), and would shorten the cycle slightly for some investigators.

There are some disadvantages including nearly continuous submission dates leaving less time for other tasks in business offices. There might be some complications with the window of consideration for late applications. And, some PIs might perceive it as unfair that K applicants can take longer than R01s.

Additionally, timing for implementing any schedule changes also must be considered. In discussion, however, most attendees agreed that people adjust and that it might be best to implement a changed schedule with the mechanism change to electronic.

Since the electronic process is in its infancy, NIH is giving people a one-week correction period so that the errors can be corrected and the application resubmitted before final verification. Eventually, NIH will require that an on-time submission will mean that a "clean" application (i.e., no Grants.gov or NIH errors) be submitted to Grants.gov by the application deadline and that the application image is verified within two days of its availability in eRA Commons. This is the only way NIH will be able to leverage electronic submission and to realize the goal of shortening time from submission to award.

Discussion

- Overall response was positive.

- Suggest giving more time for resubmission.

- If we couple the schedule change with the transition of the mechanism to electronic submission it may be a way to sell the transition.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held in Seattle, Washington, in conjunction with the FDP meeting on May 22. Sunday, May 21, was recommended. The decision will be emailed to the CWG.

Attendees

CWG Members

Arias, Lynette (Oregon Health and Science University)
Guentert, Kellie (UC Davis)
Forstmeier, Kenneth (Penn. State Univ.)
McKinney, Tolliver (St. Jude Children's Research Hospital)
Randolph, James (Univ. of Mich.)
Summers, Holly (Emory Univ.)
Sweet, Mark A. (Univ of Wisc., Madison)
Webb, Pamela (Stanford Univ.)
Wilson, Thomas (City of Hope, National Med.Ctr & Beckman Research Institute)

Other Institutional Representatives

Crisostomo, Linda (UC Berkeley)
Drinane, Tom (Dartmouth Coll.)
Dwyer, Dan (Cornell Univ.)
Foster, Carolyn (Oregon Health and Sci. Univ.)
Hull, David (Northwestern Univ.)
Israel, Beth (Columbia Univ.)
Kirk, Graydon (Emory Univ.)
Kusick, Michael (UC Berkeley)
Spalding, Frances (Univ. of Minn.)
Marcussen, Tom (Oregon Health and Sci. Univ.)
Marshall, Sue (Univ. of Minn.)
McNulty, Patricia (UMass Medical)
Miller, Esteria (U.T. Southwestern Med. School, Dallas)
Roadfeldt, Susan (Columbia Univ.)
Robinson, David (Oregon Health and Sci. Univ.)
Schum, Winifred (Univ. of Minn.)
Smith, Marcia (Partners Mass. General Hosp, Brigham & Women's Hosp.)
Swavely, Todd (Univ. of Pennsylvania)

Service Providers

Burnette, Travis (Clinical Tools)
Harker, Chris (Cayuse)
Rodman, John (RAMS Company)

NIH Staff/Contractors/Grants.gov

Columbus, Megan (OER)
Cummins, Sheri (LTS/OER)
Fadeley, Vicki (OERRM)
Fisher, Suzanne (CSR)

Flach, Jennifer (OERRM)
Fox, Daniel (OERRM)
Gibb, Scarlett (OERRM)
Gonzales, Mary (HHS/Grants.gov)
Hahn, Marcia (OPERA)
Rockey, Sallie (OER)
Sukhenko, Mikhail (OERRM)
Seppala, Sandy (LTS/OERRM)
Wright, David (FDP)