

NIH eRA Commons Working Group (CWG)

Date: Sunday, May 23, 2007
Location: Washington, DC
Chair: Scarlett Gibb
Next Meeting: Sunday, September, 9, 2007 (tentative)

Action Items

1. (Scarlett Gibb) Explore suggestion to allow eSNAPs to be routed between all PD/PIs on a Multiple-PI application and provide ability to capture notes.
2. (Scarlett Gibb) Run report on current rate of use for Closeout (note that a similar report of FSR would be artificially inflated because NIH uses it).
3. (Institutions) Provide any specific examples of Closeout data inconsistencies to commons@od.nih.gov.
4. (Marcia Hahn, Scarlett Gibb) Look into possibility of providing view access for NIH staff to FSRs in “Pending” state (i.e. submitted electronically to OFM but not yet approved).
5. (Marcia Hahn, Scarlett Gibb) Make sure pop-up messages are different if inventions are reported.
6. (Sheri Cummins) Send public notice to the applicant community confirming that NIH will be using PureEdge through the end of July receipt dates.
7. (Marcia Hahn, Scarlett Gibb) Investigate ability to submit pop tracking changes through eSNAP without compromising original data.
8. (CWG Members) Take a critical look at eSNAP over the next two months and provide suggestions for enhancements and improvements through the CWG listserv or directly to Megan Columbus at megan.columbus@nih.hhs.gov and Scarlett Gibb at scarlett.gibb@nih.hhs.gov.
9. (Scarlett Gibb) Compile list of known eSNAP issues for discussion at next CWG meeting.
10. (Jim Angus) Distribute link to a website mock-up that CWG members can access and provide feedback.
11. (CWG Members) Provide suggestions and feedback regarding the eRA website redesign to oris@mail.nih.gov.
12. (Scarlett Gibb, Sam Smith) Remind helpdesk staff on appropriate handling of PI and Department change requests.
13. (Scarlett Gibb) Send a schedule for Organization Hierarchy implementation.
14. (Megan Columbus) Assign communications staff to assist technical team with review of current email notifications and associated documentation.
15. (Scarlett Gibb) Provide full list of notifications an eRA user might receive.
16. (Daniel Fox) Identify recipients and how contact information is obtained for each email notification.

17. (Marcia Hahn) Send reminder to GM staff about the importance of maintaining good grantee organization grants management contact information.
18. (Megan Columbus) Discuss with appropriate NIH staff the request to include the application/grant number in assignment mailer notifications.
19. (Megan Columbus) Poll current CWG members to determine if they would like to continue working with the CWG.
20. (Megan Columbus) Summarize CWG mission, goals and types of issues the group will address.
21. (Daniel Fox) Look at hitlist page and verify Status codes are displayed correctly for withdrawn applications.
22. (Scarlett Gibb) Investigate possibility of including Commons link to document explaining why a proposal was withdrawn for non-compliance.
23. (Megan Columbus) Email plans for next CWG meeting.

Handouts & Presentations

- [eRA Commons Update](#)
- [X-TRAIN Pilot Recruiting Note](#)
- [eSubmission Update](#)
- [Electronic Requests to Access Research Data](#)
- [eRA Website Redesign](#)
- [Organization Hierarchy Past Present Future](#)
- [eRA Commons Email Messages](#)
- [eRA Status Codes](#)

Welcome

Scarlett Gibb welcomed CWG members to the meeting. Each participant introduced themselves.

General Update

Recent Enhancements

Scarlett Gibb

Presentation: [eRA Commons Update](#)

Discussion Points:

- (Regarding Reference Letter submenu change in April Release 2.9.2.2) Scarlett explained that reference letters are now submitted through the Commons for Pioneer applications. Will be expanded to other mechanisms down the road. The person submitting the reference letter does not need a Commons account, but does need to know the Commons account Username of the PI, the applicant's last name, the funding opportunity number and the [eRA Commons](#) or [Reference Letter page](#) URL.

Although they can not see the text of the submitted letters, SOs and PIs can now view who has submitted reference letter information. Letters that are matched to a grant application will display the Application ID and project title. If the PI has not yet submitted their application they can still see “orphaned” letters. Letters that are not matched to an application are deleted after six months.

- (Regarding Notice of grant Award change in May Release 2.9.2.4) The PDF version of the Notice of grant Award (NoA) has been added to “Other Relevant Documents” in status detail of the Commons PI view. Shows all versions of NoAs including revisions for a grant year. There were some document template issues with the header found in the original rollout that are being addressed.
- (Known issue – SO and AO can no longer upload the progress report for the PI) Scarlett explained that when changes were made in this area, the developers “fixed” the code to match the requirements on record. The requirements have been updated and the ability for the SO and AO to upload the progress report will be reinstated (targeted for July release). Users with the ASST role can upload progress reports for the PI.
- (Regarding 2.10 release targeted for July 2007) eSNAP is the official record for PI signature. eSNAP must be expanded to accommodate all PD/PI signatures on Multiple-PI applications. The model being used is a single progress report with multiple signatures. Suggestions were made to allow PIs to route eSNAP between all PIs with the ability to capture notes.

Action: (Scarlett Gibb) **Explore suggestion to allow eSNAPs to be routed between all PD/PIs on a Multiple-PI application and provide ability to capture notes.**

Looking Ahead

Upcoming X-TRAIN Pilot

Marcia Hahn

Handout: [X-TRAIN Pilot Recruiting Note](#)

Discussion Points:

- Marcia announced that NIH plans to have a production pilot of the new X-TRAIN system from October 12-November 30, 2007. NIH is looking for approximately ten institutions to participate in the pilot. Pilot participants will be given permission to delay processing of paper 2271 & Termination Notice forms normally submitted in summer and early fall for electronic submission during the pilot period. Termination Notice history will be in the system so no re-keying will be necessary. PIs will be able to delegate authority to ASSTs, but the PI will still have to submit. The X-TRAIN Pilot Recruiting Note contains additional details.

Requiring FSR and Closeout

Discussion Points:

- NIH would like to require the use of Financial Status Report (FSR) and Closeout through the eRA Commons this fiscal year and polled the group for any potential showstoppers that would need to be addressed prior to making the use of the services mandatory.
- Many institutions noted they have already made the use of FSR and Closeout an institutional requirement and it has been working fine.

Action: (Scarlett Gibb) Run report on current rate of use for Closeout (note that a similar report of FSR would be artificially inflated because NIH uses it).

- Question was raised regarding how NIH's FSR and Closeout is aligned with combined federal form activities. Marcia indicated NIH is very much involved in the federal-wide form consolidation efforts and NIH systems will be reevaluated as those efforts unfold. There is sufficient time before the federal-wide initiatives come to fruition to warrant moving ahead with the systems that are already in place with the knowledge that adjustments for compliance will be needed down the road.
- Some CWG members noted there is a delay in Closeout records showing up in eRA Commons. Marcia explained that NIH staff must take an action prior to the records becoming visible. Currently there is a great deal of disparity in how quickly the records are actioned across the ICs. She noted that the function is being centralized to a group of dedicated staff and will no longer be done by the grants management specialists distributed across NIH. This change should provide more timely and consistent processing.
- A concern was raised about data consistency in Closeout. For example, closed report shows applications with open actions. The Commons team was not aware of any issues with data consistency and asked for specific examples.

Action: (Institutions) Provide any specific examples of Closeout data inconsistencies to commons@od.nih.gov.

- A web service is not currently available. Not currently included in our FY2007 plans.
- Some CWG members noted that NIH grants management staff sometimes call and ask for a copy of the FSR that was submitted. Marcia noted that the Office of Financial Management has been short staffed all year and only recently was able to fill their open positions. This has caused some delays in information becoming available to the grants management staff.

Action: (Marcia Hahn, Scarlett Gibb) Look into possibility of providing view access for NIH staff to FSRs in "Pending" state (i.e. submitted electronically to OFM but not yet approved).

- Question was raised whether we are eliminating the signature requirement from the invention form. This is not in the current request to OMB for approval.
- The pop-up message should be different if inventions are reported.

Action: (Marcia Hahn, Scarlett Gibb) Make sure pop-up messages are different if inventions are reported.

- The group noted that if FSR & Closeout are made mandatory, AOs need to be given the rights to perform the functions. A fix has been scheduled to accommodate this.
- The group asked if NIH is working on standardizing language between the PHS 398 and the SF424 (R&R) since the PHS 398 will likely be around for a while longer. Some effort in this area has already taken place (e.g. using new definitions for Resubmission/Renewal/Revision, change from % effort to effort months).
- The group agreed that several months notice would be appropriate prior to making FSR and Closeout required.

eSubmission Issues

Megan Columbus

Presentation: [eSubmission Update](#)

Discussion Points:

- Megan announced that Jen Flach will be leaving NIH to become an independent contractor.
- Megan noted that the eRA system is now servicing other agencies (AHRQ, CDC, FDA, SAMHSA and VA). NIH is moving cautiously in this direction to ensure that the systems continue to meet the basic needs of NIH users and service to our own user base is not diminished.
- The move to Adobe-based forms remains on hold. Grants.gov has not yet delivered a version of the SF424 (R&R) forms that is fully operational and ready for testing. The form in form concept of the subaward form remains an issue.

Action: (Sheri Cummins) Send public notice to the applicant community confirming that NIH will be using PureEdge through the end of July receipt dates.

- Originally Grants.gov indicated that all forms must be transitioned to Adobe by October. However, given the delays an extension is not off the table.
- Recommendations for communications for Adobe forms:
 - Mac users should be discouraged from using Preview to look at PDF files.
 - The Attachments Tab on the left in Adobe viewer provides quick access to all attachments.
- Form changes needed to support FFATA may hit at same time as Adobe transition. Initial reviews of the SF424 (R&R) data set indicate that most of the needed data elements are covered.

Electronic Requests to Access Research Data

Megan Columbus

Presentation: [Electronic Requests to Access Research Data](#)

Discussion Points:

- Brief description of plan to accommodate access to research data electronically, and how NIH is using Commons authentication for this effort. Notes are included in the presentation above.
- Guide Notices from participating Institutes and Centers are scheduled to be published in the next couple of weeks.

Optimizing eSNAP

Scarlett Gibb

Discussion Points:

- NIH would like to move towards making eSNAP mandatory for enabled mechanisms, but understands that some functionality must be implemented first (e.g. must be able to support signatures of multiple PIs). Scarlett asked the group for feedback and items they would like to see fixed or implemented prior to making eSNAP mandatory.

- Many institutions noted they already have internal requirements to use eSNAP.
- Several concerns were raised about publications:
 - Special characters are not accepted in the publication name; have to type characters out (e.g. “alpha”)
 - It is not always intuitive what information is being requested; would like clearer indication of what user needs to supply.
 - When adding other documents, items that had already been checked became “unchecked” forcing a return to the PI to checkmark the items again.
- K’s sometimes have pop tracking tables. Since NIH doesn’t report out on K’s the system doesn’t allow pop tracking data to be entered.
- Inclusion enrollment reports – sometimes they show up when not expected and other times when they are expected they don’t show up.
- Can’t use eSNAP system to make straightforward changes like increase of study participants or change in race. Helpdesk does not have authority to change pop tracking data.
- System shows that the eSNAP is overdue when it is not. This causes concern for PIs and auditors. This is a known issue.
- AOs need to be able to perform the functionality

Action: (Marcia Hahn, Scarlett Gibb) Investigate ability to submit pop tracking changes through eSNAP without compromising original data.

- The group was asked to take a critical look at eSNAP over the next two months and provide suggestions for enhancements and improvements through the CWG listserv or directly to Megan Columbus at megan.columbus@nih.hhs.gov and Scarlett Gibb at scarlett.gibb@nih.hhs.gov.

Action: (CWG Members) Take a critical look at eSNAP over the next two months and provide suggestions for enhancements and improvements through the CWG listserv or directly to Megan Columbus at megan.columbus@nih.hhs.gov and Scarlett Gibb at scarlett.gibb@nih.hhs.gov.

Action: (Scarlett Gibb) Compile list of known eSNAP issues for discussion at next CWG meeting.

eRA Website Redesign

Jim Angus

Presentation: [eRA Website Redesign](#)

Discussion Points:

- Megan noted that the eRA Website Redesign project goes hand-in-hand with a larger OER and NIH Website redesign. Activities are focused on providing more hand holding for newer users and making information easily accessible. Now that electronic services are embedded in policy resources it is an interesting exercise to determine the correct “home” for information.

- A suggestion was made to include an Alerts section with timely information on system status, scheduled downtimes, etc. that would be updated often to encourage repeat visits to the site.
- A member noted that she uses the site to look through minutes from CWG and other groups. Megan noted that some of that information may be removed from the eRA site and communicated through the OER site in a more appropriate format.

Action: (Jim Angus) Distribute link to a website mock-up that CWG members can access and provide feedback.

Action: (CWG Members) Provide suggestions and feedback regarding the eRA website redesign to oris@mail.nih.gov.

Organization Hierarchy – Past, Present, and Future

Jim Tucker

Presentation: [Organization Hierarchy Past, Present, Future](#)

Discussion Points:

- Today, NIH staff has no systematic way to know that changes in an organization have taken place. Often changes were identified and addressed at the time of competitive renewal. The use of Virtual Organization Layers (VOL) allows the people that know the organization structure best to maintain the hierarchy.
- Several group members indicated it is difficult to make PI or Department changes. It would be helpful to keep procedures in a standard place. Jim noted that PI and Department changes should be reported to the helpdesk who would then forward the request to his data quality staff to make the change.

Action: (Scarlett Gibb, Sam Smith) Remind helpdesk staff on appropriate handling of PI and Department change requests.

- Will NIH attempt to match an application/grant to the hierarchy? Institutions need a way to maintain the data if they take the time to clean it up.

Action: (Scarlett Gibb) Send a schedule for Organization Hierarchy implementation.

- NIH has developed a new web tool to track awards by institution, type of award, major components and department, allowing applicants to pull their own data and perform analysis. (See presentation for additional information.) The tool is available from the OER website and via a direct link: <http://grants1.nih.gov/grants/award/trends/FindOrg.cfm>

Commons eNotifications

Daniel Fox

Handout: [eRA Commons Email Messages](#)

Discussion Points:

Daniel distributed a handout with the email notifications that are sent out by the Commons. The messages have not been reviewed for several years. The group was asked for general feedback on the messages. Suggestions included:

- Provide consistent direction on where to go for help

- Use plain language – avoid jargon
- Use consistent punctuation and capitalization (e.g. eSNAP, e-SNAP, ESNAP – pick one)
- Give step-by-step instructions for how to get to a particular page, function etc.

Action: (Megan Columbus) Assign communications staff to assist technical team with review of current email notifications and associated documentation.

- Rework document to include:
 - Different format – numbering scheme of document implies hierarchy that doesn't exist
 - All notifications a user might see regardless of its source (Commons, eRA eXchange, eNotification, etc.). For example, notifications for assignment mailers, score letters and eSubmission are not included in the list.

Action: (Scarlett Gibb) Provide full list of notifications an eRA user might receive.

- List of recipients and how the contact email information is obtained (e.g. from application, from profile)

Action: (Daniel Fox) Identify recipients and how contact information is obtained for each email notification.

- It is not clear how to update grants management contact information. NIH grants management staff can update contact records.

Action: (Marcia Hahn) Send reminder to GM staff about the importance of maintaining good grantee organization grants management contact information.

- Generally would like more specifics in the emails themselves. Suzanne noted that due to email reliability and security issues notifications tend to point the recipient to check eRA Commons for updated status.
- It would be helpful if the application/grant number could be included in assignment mailer notifications. NIH makes a distinction between applications and awards. Once information is part of the public domain, NIH has greater freedom regarding what can be shared in email. In this case the application/grant number really doesn't provide any private information and may not be an issue. Further internal NIH discussion is needed.

Action: (Megan Columbus) Discuss with appropriate NIH staff the request to include the application/grant number in assignment mailer notifications.

Future Direction of CWG

Megan Columbus

Discussion Points:

- Marcia thanked Jim Randolph for all his contributions and support as an original member of CWG. This meeting is Jim Randolph's last. Jim has been the "NIH Guy" since 1978, long before the CWG was created.
- Megan noted that after the creation of the CWG seven years ago, there was an intense focus on the design of the Commons, but policy has always been a key component. NIH leadership of the CWG

began with George Stone from Office of Policy for Extramural Research Administration (OPERA). David Wright, who worked for OPERA and then took a position with eRA, was next at the helm. When David departed to work with FDP, Scarlett Gibb assumed his position with the CWG. NIH would like to pull the CWG out of eRA and raise it up a level to the Office of Extramural Research to provide a technical, policy and review perspective. Megan will be the new CWG chair and she will partner with Scarlett Gibb, Marcia Hahn, and Suzanne Fisher to cover the key focus areas.

- Megan suggested adding a co-chair from an applicant institution to assist with setting appropriate agendas and to assist in articulating user priorities to NIH governance. The group decided the decision of whether or not to have a co-chair should be put off until the group is reorganized. For now, NIH will continue to provide the framework for meeting agendas with adequate space for additional items to be suggested by CWG members.
- The CWG will continue to be a sounding board for topics like eSubmission and other issues regarding interacting with NIH electronically. The group liked the idea of covering the full NIH perspective and not just Commons.
- Membership has had low turnover. The CWG will need to determine if the current makeup of the group is sufficient or if there is a need for fresh faces representing a wider variety of constituents. Also need to decide if membership is based on institutional affiliation or individual experience. Some members may want to step down after many years of CWG service, others may want to continue.

Action: (Megan Columbus) Poll current CWG members to determine if they would like to continue working with the CWG.

- Norka Ruiz Bravo suggested that NIH summarize the mission of the group, the goals, and the types of issues the group will tackle. Once these items are clearly defined, the make-up of the group should be more obvious.

Action: (Megan Columbus) Summarize CWG mission, goals and types of issues the group will address.

- The group indicated that they would like to re-emphasize the “working group” and focus less on NIH updates (i.e. more interactive). Need a mix of members that will bring various perspectives and provide productive debate of issues.
- Steve Dowdy suggested that the group continue to look for streamlining opportunities.

Open Discussion

Commons Statuses

Kellie Guentert

Handout: [eRA Status Codes](#)

Issue:

Kellie noted that she recently was working with two proposals which had the Commons Status of “withdrawn”. This threw the PIs into a panic because they had not withdrawn their applications. Eventually, Kellie discovered that the proposals were withdrawn by the NIH IC for non-compliance and the official letters with explanation were mailed but not yet received.

Discussion Points:

- There should be clear Status codes that distinguish between Institutional Withdrawal and NIH Withdrawal. A handout of eRA Status Codes was provided and there are codes in the system that allow for the distinction. It is possible that the proposals were coded incorrectly.

Action: (Daniel Fox) Look at hitlist page and verify Status codes are displayed correctly for withdrawn applications.

- Would like an email notification from NIH when a proposal is withdrawn and the explanation document placed in Commons under “Other Documents” or add electronically to the Grant folder for PIs to be able to view.

Action: (Scarlett Gibb) Investigate possibility of including Commons link to document explaining why a proposal was withdrawn for non-compliance.

Special RFA Instructions & S2S Concerns

Steve Dowdy

Issue:

A request was made by the group to ‘call out’ differences in an RFA/PA that are not in line with the Application Guide instructions. One suggestion was to note them all at the top of the FOA.

Discussion Points:

- It is difficult for applicants and System-to-System providers to key in on special requirements that are listed within Section IV of the Announcement.
- Individual ICs are still requesting items that are different and it is not always obvious in the FOA. The S2S folks have to adjust code sometimes to accommodate these requests.
- A suggestion was made to create a panel to ‘champion’ consistency in FOAs.

eRA Requirement for Separate SO & PI Accounts

Steve Dowdy

Issue:

Currently, the eRA system requires separate accounts for PI and SO roles. If the PI and SO are the same person for an application, that one person requires two accounts to submit electronically and track their application.

Discussion Points:

- Steve noted (via email to CWG listserv) that views should be cumulative according to a user’s roles. The more roles a person has, the more menu items that are displayed. The goal is for a person to have one account. As we move toward a single government-wide ID, an eRA design change in this area will become even more important.
- Ken added that while the views (or data exposed) to multiple-role users should be cumulative there should also be a mechanism in place to minimize the data exposed during a session to only the roles a user chooses.
- Organization Hierarchy will help in this area.

- The recent PI delegation changes address some of the roles vs. rights issues, but the delegation approach is not scalable.
- NIH agreed that an eRA design change is needed, but it would need to be prioritized against the other requested improvements.

Next Meeting

The next CWG meeting will be held in conjunction with the September 10-11 FDP meeting. We are targeting Sunday, September 9. The final decision for CWG meeting timing and location will be emailed to the CWG listserv.

Action: (Megan Columbus) Email plans for next CWG meeting.

Attendees

CWG Members

Arias, Lynette (Oregon Health and Science University)
 Custer, Tammy (Cornell)
 Dowdy, Stephen (MIT)
 Forstmeier, Kenneth (Penn. State Univ.)
 Gray, Patricia (Rensselaer Polytechnic Inst.; representing Denise Clark)
 Guentert, Kellie (UC Davis)
 Randolph, Jim (University of Michigan)
 Ross, Susan (Northwestern University)
 Sommers, Holly (Emory University)

Other Institutional Representatives

Beattie, Robert (Univ. Of Michigan)
 Benveniste, Cari (Oregon Health & Science University)
 Broking, Emily (Penn. State Univ.)
 Cheng-Chong, Cora (Mass. General Hospital)
 Drinane, Tom (Dartmouth)
 Golden-Eppelein (Oregon Health & Science University)
 Hull, David (Northwestern University)
 Kusiak, Michael (UC Berkeley)
 Lipkin, Stu (Emory)

Miller, Esteria (U.T. Southwestern Med. School, Dallas)
 Spalding, Frances (Univ. of Minn.)
 Swavely, Todd (Univ. of Pennsylvania)

Service Providers

Bozler, Dianne (ERA Software Systems)
 Frackelton, David (Cayuse)
 Priest, Ben (Cayuse)

NIH Staff/Contractors/Grants.gov

Angus, Jim (NIH/OER/eRA)
 Columbus, Megan (NIH/OER)
 Cummins, Sheri (NIH/OER/eRA, Contractor)
 Curren, David (NIH/OER/OPERA)
 Fisher, Suzanne (NIH/CSR)
 Fox, Daniel (NIH/OER/eRA, Contractor)
 Gardner, George (NIH/OER/OPERA)
 Gibb, Scarlett (NIH/OER/eRA)
 Gilden, Pam (NIH/OER/OPERA)
 Hahn, Marcia (NIH/OER/OPERA)
 Kocher, Stacey ((NIH/OER/eRA, Contractor)
 Rockey, Sally (OD/OER)
 Ruiz Bravo, Norca (OD/OER)
 Smith, Samuel (NIH/OER/eRA, Contractor)
 Subramanya, Manju (NIH/OER/eRA, Contractor)
 Wigglesworth, Carol (NIH/OER/OPERA)