# Workgroup on Extramural Training Systems (WETS)

**Date:** November 16, 2004
**Time:** 10:00 a.m.–11:30 a.m.
**Location:** Rockledge 1, Room 3502
**Advocates:** Barbara Huffman, Rick Ikeda, (Dr. Walter Schaffer)

**Next Meeting:** December 9, 2004, 10 a.m. to 11:30 a.m., Rockledge 1, Room 3502

## Action items

1. (Linda Katzper) Help Dwight Mowery contact the IMPAC II system staff so that he can discuss the possibility of using the IMPAC II system for NLM data.
2. (Linda Katzper) Investigate the possibility of implementing a flag indicator in the IMPAC II system to distinguish between NIH and NRSA grants.
3. (Rick Ikeda) Email WETS group the URL to QVR and include instructions on how to access reports containing training activity data.

## National Library of Medicine and TA System

*Dwight Mowery, Linda Katzper*

Dwight Mowery, grants officer for the National Library Medicine (NLM), discussed the possibility of using eRA's TA module to handle, monitor, and process training activity that occurs within his organization.

Dwight explained that while NLM follows most of the NRSA (National Research Service Award) guidelines concerning training activity, there are a few key differences between NLM and NRSA:

- The National Library of Medicine is not part of the NRSA, but its training programs are supported under the Medical Library Assistance Act of 1965.
- NLM requires no payback on any of its training mechanisms that include its Biomedical Informatics Training Program.
- The NLM has a different stipend scale for its predocs. Predocs may receive greater amounts for stipends based upon education and experience in "priority fields," e.g. computational biology, medical informatics, mathematics, computer science, etc.
- NRSA allows five years of support for predocs while NLM only allows four years of support.

Dwight said that he is not sure whether NLM data would conflict with the prescribed data fields in the IMPAC II system. Rick Ikeda seemed to think that the data entry fields in IMPAC II would accommodate NLM needs, but a closer analysis would be necessary to be sure. Linda Katzper said that based on what Dwight has already articulated, the IMPAC II system should map well to NLM data needs. However, eRA would need to formally map the IMPAC II system to NLM data entry requirements to know for certain. Entry of old NLM data could become complicated if NLM data does not map well with the IMPAC II system. Rick recommended that Dwight meet with the IMPAC II coordinators to discuss his needs in greater detail; Linda offered to provide Dwight the information of key IMPAC II contacts.

**Action: (Linda Katzper) Help Dwight Mowery contact the IMPAC II system staff so that he can discuss the possibility of using the IMPAC II system for NLM data.**

Dwight asked whether NLM data would be located under NIH or under NRSA within the system. Linda said that she was unsure and would need to check. She was unsure whether it would be important to differentiate NRSA and NIH data. Dwight asked whether it is possible to identify and distinguish an NRSA grant from an NIH grant within the system. Rick said that currently there is no way to distinguish grants from different agencies within DHHS; all the data simply resides in the IMPAC II database. The group agreed that a flag indicator would be helpful and necessary to distinguish different DHHS agency grants. Linda said that she would look into the matter.

**Action: (Linda Katzper) Investigate the possibility of implementing a flag indicator in the IMPAC II system to distinguish between NIH and NRSA grants.**

After listening to Dwight's proposal, the group asked the following questions:

- *How many grants does NLM process for training activity?*—NLM has a small batch of grants, approximately eighteen.
- *What would NLM gain from using the IMPAC II system?*—Dwight explained that his organization does not have the funds to support the monitoring of a database. He said that now is a key time to seek the assistance of the IMPAC II system.

## Termination Notices

The group expressed concern about the handling of termination notices. Currently, termination notices will often go unsigned by trainees and the NIH will often remain unaware of this fact until years later. This can cause problems for the Loan Repayment Program: LRP won't issue a payment if the Termination Notice isn't signed. Many payments are held up as a result of missing or unsigned termination notices.

It would be really helpful if the system issued an email reminding trainees to sign termination notices 30 days after their training appointment ends. This email should also be sent to the business office as well as the Program Director.

Linda Katzper said that the second iteration of X-Train will be dealing with termination notices. Specifically, eRA is proposing an e-notification system to handle this. This iteration of X-Train will be released in about a year. However, Linda assured the group that eRA is aware is of the issues with termination notices and is working on a solution.

The group suggested that eRA consider the following, as well, when developing a method of handling termination notices:

- Determine how the system will handle *early* termination notices—that is, when TAs leave early. Currently, NIH isn't notified when a TA leaves before the end of their appointment date. Usually, the TA will not contact NIH about an early discharge. How can we receive this information?

- Send a message to TAs (who have not signed or completed termination notices) saying that incomplete or unsigned termination notices will impact future grant funding. These kinds of messages may go a long way to improving communication about termination decisions. However, this message would need to be carefully worded and eRA would need to get permission to feature such a message in the system. The group recommended that Linda work directly with Walter Schaffer on this initiative. The group also suggested that this message contain a URL that would direct a user to the very form that he or she needs to complete and sign in order to continue productive relations with the NIH

- Establish a Commons accounts for each TA. This way, if TAs fail to complete or sign termination notices, then their Commons accounts will be blocked and they will be presented with a red box saying “Complete this!” or “Outstanding Termination Notice” (or something to that effect). The group agreed that a Commons account may be the most effective way to contact TAs; email is subject to change and can be an unreliable means of contacting an individual.

## System Development Updates

*Linda Katzper*

Several changes are being made to the TA module, including—

- A new termination button. Software will change now so that only a sweep will be between the sweep and implementation of changes.

- The addition of LRP dates to the Payback Snapshot Report

- Rounding months on the Payback Snapshot report to the nearest tenth

- Changes to the Payback worksheet lines. Most of these changes involve the backend to ensure accurate calculations. When a person has a payback status of 103, 102, 107 (turned over to OFM) and pays back, there should be an easy way to recalculate the balance.

- Disabling user’s ability to enter LRP dates into the user interface.

- Disabling entry of DSF (Discipline, Speciality, Field) codes.

- Making entry of FOT (Field of Training) easier for re-appointments.

All new functionality will be on hold until after the TA module has been converted to J2EE (Web-based platform).

eRA is also working on improving the X-Train module. X-Train development will occur in three iterations; however, new X-Train functionality will not be released until all three iterations have been completed. The three iterations involve the following:

- **First Iteration—**Meeting with developers to iron out details of first iteration, which is to allow create, reappoint, and amend.

- **Second Iteration—**Working on termination work flow. However, eRA needs to meet with Marcia Hahn and others to ensure that this workflow is correct.
- **Third Iteration—**Ensuring an end-to-end version of TA and X-Train. Planning is just now beginning on this iteration; a vision document is in progress.

The group also raised other related issues:

- Marie explained that there is a problem with code 113. When she hits the "recalculate" button, the system will sometimes indicate that a trainee has a payback obligation when, in reality, they have already repaid the NIH. Somehow, the system is reopening files that should remain closed.
- The group expressed concern about the Helpdesk collapsing profiles. Apparently, sometimes the Helpdesk is collapsing two profiles that are not really of the same individual. This is a real problem.
- Rick asked the group whether the NIH requires enough information about individuals in order to successfully identify them in the system. Marie said that the problem is not in the amount (or lack) of information entered into the system, but in the frequency of human typo errors. In many instances, training applicants will transpose letters, enter incorrect numbers, etc. She said that applicants should be required to enter significant information twice. Currently, that is not the case. Marie also expressed concern about the recent policy change requiring users to only enter the last four digits of the social security number instead of all nine digits. Nonetheless, she feels that users should still be required to enter the last four digits into the system twice to prevent transposition or misspelling. Marie also said that it would be incredibly helpful if applicants were required to enter their entire legal name, rather than just their first and last name. Sometimes, the middle name of an individual makes a world of difference when trying to successfully identify that individual—especially if one is faced with 26 different "John Smiths." Finally, Marie said that it would be very helpful if applicants would enter the name of the university that the training applicant is attending. One day this information may prove crucial, particularly if Congress were to ask for the various states that are actively using LRP.
- Marie said that she cannot tell what LRPs have and have not been funded. Linda Katzper recommended that Marie look at the Payback Screen for the funded dates. Marie said that she has consulted this screen but that it doesn't list the FY04 dates yet.

## Reporting Capabilities for Training Data

*Rick Ikeda*

As developments progress on TA and X-Train, it is important that the group begin thinking about how NIH staff can actually pull data out of these modules. Currently, the only reporting tool that accesses data in the TA module is QVR. Using QVR, users can enter a T-32 and receive a hitlist of information that can be downloaded into an Excel spreadsheet. QVR allows users to view a host of reports, including NRSA reports, Trainee Degrees, and Training Appointments. These reports are grant-centric. However, QVR does not give users the ability to look at DSF codes or to view appointee-specific reports. Group members asked if Rick could send them the URL to QVR and instructions on where to locate training-related reports; Rick agreed to forward the URL via email.

**Action: (Rick Ikeda) Email WETS group the URL to QVR and include instructions on how to access reports containing training activity data.**

## Open Discussion

***NRSA Contact List***—Linda Stecklein said that she needs to update the NRSA list. Rick recommended that she work with Wally Schaffer, contact Grants Management Officers (GMOs), or ask DEAS (Division of Extramural Activities Support). Linda said that she would try DEAS.