eRA Project Team Meeting Minutes

Date: Tuesday, July 08, 2003
Time: 9:00–11:00 a.m.
Location: 6700 B Rockledge, Room 1205
Chair: JJ McGowan

Next Meeting: Tuesday, August 12, 9:00 a.m., 6700 B Rockledge, Room 1205

Note: The meeting scheduled for July 22 has been cancelled.

Action Items

1. (Tim Twomey) Provide Pete Morton with list of current NSF logins for QVR. Pete will check logs to determine frequency of use to gain a better understanding of the extent of the issue.
2. (Dave Carter) Raise data access concerns with Belinda Seto and solicit her assistance in defining the needed data access policy.
3. (Steve Hughes) Define architectural plan for moving QVR within the NIH firewalls.

Attachments

- QVR Security Concern (Dave Carter): http://era.nih.gov/Docs/QVR_Issue.ppt
- Database Resource Plan (Ali Ghassemzadeh): http://era.nih.gov/Docs/NIH_ERA_DATA_ACCESS_PLAN_4.ppt

Project Report

JJ McGowan

HHS continues in its efforts to reduce the number of seperate grants management systems and will consolidate its 12 grants systems down to two. The NIH eRA systems will service all research grants. ACF will handle discretionary and other grants. ERA will be tasked with building a common data mart to be used for seamless reporting and tracking between the systems. Pre-award processing for CDC research grants will begin in FY2004. Project costing estimates for the CDC migration are in progress. Other OPDIVs must map out their migration strategies in FY2004.

JJ welcomed Danielle Bielenstein to the eRA Project Team. Danielle will be serving as Budget advocate for the project. Danielle worked for the Smithsonian Institutions prior to joining NIH and will bring a wealth of experience and a fresh perspective to the table.

Pre-Award Data

Dave Carter

Tim has received requests from non-HHS agencies, specifically the National Science Foundation (NSF), for IMPAC II accounts to access QVR. Some of these users have had IMPAC I accounts in the past. Since there is no mechanism in the current data architecture to restrict access to data

by type, these users can see all data including competitive pre-award data. About a half a dozen pre-existing accounts were migrating to IMPAC II for NSF and Tim has several outstanding requests for new accounts.

Action: (Tim Twomey) Provide Pete Morton with list of current NSF logins for QVR. Pete will check logs to determine frequency of use to gain a better understanding of the extent of the issue.

Although the Project Team acknowledges that there are legitimate reasons for outside agencies to want to access certain pieces of data, the inability to restrict access to pre-award data and/or verify that the requester has a legitimate need and authority to access any NIH data prior to issuing the account is a real concern that must be addressed.

The Project Team members suggested instituting data use agreements between organizations to define why the data is needed, what it will be used for, and who within the organizations has appropriate authority to access the data. Similarly, NIH should be prepared to enter into data use agreements to define how data from other OPDIVs will be handled within NIH as the OPDIVs migrate to eRA systems.

The Project Team agreed that the next step was to bring the issue to Belinda Seto to define the data access policy. Once the policy is defined, the User Support and Communications and Outreach branches can take appropriate actions with the current and pending accounts.

Action: (Dave Carter) Raise data access concerns with Belinda Seto and solicit her assistance in defining the needed data access policy.

QVR Security Concerns

Dave Carter

In a related topic to the Data Access Policy issue, Dave raised the concern that QVR sits outside the NIH firewall. In the current configuration, external QVR users enter through port 80 and just login to QVR—bypassing the machine-level verification that takes place for other eRA applications.

Given the sensitivity of pre-award data that can be accessed via QVR, the question was raised whether QVR should be pulled inside the firewall. There is an NIH policy that states what types of applications and data should be inside and outside of NIH firewalls. After reviewing that policy, Dave has made the recommendation to pull QVR within the firewall to enforce machine-level, as well as, logon verification for external QVR users.

Action: (Steve Hughes) Define architectural plan for moving QVR within the NIH firewalls.

Database Resource Plan

Ali Ghassemzadeh

Ali began his presentation with a vision statement:

The vision is to have a highly available, secure, responsive, and centralized On Line Transaction Processing (OLTP) and reporting environment that supports all internal and external user requirements.

Now that the eRA system is mature and has a large internal and external user base, it is critical to better manage resources to ensure service levels are maintained. Enforcing restrictions on system resources is a best practice for large, enterprise systems and will become even more important as other operating divisions are brought online and system usage continues to grow.

The proposed database resource plan addresses the issue from both a proactive and reactive perspective. Proactively restricting resource parameters will help identify problem areas for tuning and will protect the system and all its users from the negative performance impact of runaway processes. Setting resource allocation priorities allows the system to react to system contention issues in a pre-determined and calculated way.

Proposed proactive restrictions include:

- Limits reduced for CPU per statement (reflects CPU time, not physical elapsed time)
    - User limit reduced from 13 to 3 minutes
    - Link limit reduced from unlimited to 13 minutes (may be less restrictive off-hours)
- Idle time reduced from 4 hours to 2 hours
- Disk Reads per statement
    - User limit set to 8Mb
    - Link limit set to 24Mb

Proposed reactive processing priorities (invoked only if there is contention for CPU):

- Online_group (users)
    - Commons 50%
    - Internal IMPAC 35%
- Batch_group (link accounts, bridge) 10%
- Other (users not in any other group) 5%

Ali stressed that it is not the goal of the team to break applications or prevent users from getting information they need. The goal is to identify problem areas for tuning, prevent runaway processes from affecting users, and to help move long running jobs to off-hours. Analysis to date shows that the vast majority of usage falls well within the proposed thresholds.

The proposed database resource changes will be set in the test and stage environments after testing for the August 1 release is complete. Regression testing of all eRA applications within the more restrictive environment is expected to take 3–4 weeks. The eRA teams will work closely with ICs to ensure adequate testing of extension systems takes place. Ali has presented the plan to the tech users group and gained their support as the first step in this effort.

The team will address any issues uncovered during testing on a case-by-case basis. Possible corrective action may include: tuning, adjusting restrictions on parameters, moving processing off-hours, or allowing different thresholds off-hours (8 p.m. to 8 a.m.).

After testing and approval by testers and ICs, the configuration changes will be deployed to production. The team is targeting a mid-cycle technology upgrade by 8/31/03.

Attendees

Austin, Patricia (OER/COB)
Bradley, Eileen (CSR)
Burns, Amy (LTS/COB)
Caban, Carlos (OER)
Carter, Dave (OER)
Collie, Krishna (RN Solutions)
Cobert, Penny (OD)
Copeland Sewell, Zoe-Ann (OD/OER)
Cummins, Sheri (LTS/COB)
Ghassemzadeh, Ali (OER)
Gibb, Scarlett (COB)
Goodman, Mike (OD/OER)
Hall, Dan (Z-Tech)
Hann, Della (OD/OER)
Hausman, Steve (NIAMS)
Hughes, Stephen (OD)
Lederhendler, Israel (NIMH)
Markovitz, Paul (OER)
McGowan, JJ (NIAID)
Morton, Pete (CIT)
Myers, John (NGIT)
Panniers, Richard (CSR)
Patel, Kalpesh (Ekagra)
Ratnanather, Chanath (Ekagra)
Sachar, Brad (Oracle)
Shingler, Felicia (COB)
Silverman, Jay (NGIT)
Sinnett, Everett (CSR/OD)
Soto, Tracy (OD/DEIS)
Tucker, Jim (OER)
Wilson, Mike (NGIT)
Wright, David (OPERA)