Interagency grants data set submitted to OMB

A data set unifying agencies' available research grants has been
developed by a subcommittee of the Interagency Electronic Grants
Committee and subsequently submitted to the White House Office of
Management and Budget, IAEGC co-Chair Brad Stanford, Office of Naval
Research, informed the October 18-22 Society of Research Administrators
International annual meeting in Pittsburgh.

The cross-agency data set plus a format and common set of instructions
eventually will be put up on Grants.gov to be used by investigators in
the application process, Stanford explained, adding the interagency
committee expects OMB to post the resource for public comment any day.

Federal agencies were required to post their grant announcements on the
Grants.gov portal by October 1. (see Washington Fax 5/15/03b)

"What we have right now is an unprecedented confluence: technology,
government interest and the capability of a program management office
that we've never had," Stanford stressed.

Stanford, who also serves as co-chair of the Federal Demonstration
Partnership's Committee on Electronic Research Administration,
remarked: "We have a public law that says that agencies will provide an
electronic option. We have an administration that says this is part of
the President's management agenda. So agencies are paying attention and
OMB is cracking the whip. We have all the vendors and the people who
are developing the technology paying attention and saying we just need
you to tell us what to do."

University research administrators whose institutions and principal
investigators are not yet oriented toward the world of electronic
grants are behind the curve, other speakers warned SRA members.

For example, National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
Division of Extramural Activities Director John McGowan expounded on
the agency's readiness in the e-grant area, stating, "The plan now is
for next year to be doing your grant submission to NIH for single-
project grants...through the NIH Commons or a variety of other means."

McGowan, NIH electronic research administration (eRA) point man,
admonished RAs that if "you're not registering your PIs, they're going
to be registered for you" because the Center for Scientific Review is
going to be "using the Internet for review functions, which we now have
online in the Commons."

External reviewers then will "see what sort of tools are going to be
available for the PIs, and they'll be going to question back to the
schools asking 'Why aren't we using the system'" he chided.

NIH received its first 14 pilot electronic grant applications in
October. McGowan noted the agency is "running validation and different
tests with those, so they won't compete until November to be fully

accepted, but they're our first stage to gear up for full production next year." The Commons opened up for wide registration in July and currently has 105,659 hits, 566 registered organizations and 5,519 users, approximately 2,774 of whom are PIs, the NIAID administrator reported.

McGowan also told SRA the agency is instituting new electronic management tools to enable both NIH and grantee institutions "to not look at these systems and tools purely as an administrative function."

"More and more research administration is becoming more specialized, and specialized knowledge means we are going to have to use the system as a research tool, not just as a processing tool," he said, adding this year NIH will be launching two management tools - a query tool (QT) and the virtual organizational layers (VOL).

VOL - expected to be up next summer - will allow NIH to monitor research across different institutes and centers, making it easier to do things like look at overlap and ensure PIs are submitting things that are different within the system. "Our system's going to be able to tell across [ICs] much more quickly when things are not being reported correctly," he predicted.

The system also will allow institutions to build organizational layers that "create and wall off grants within a department, so the departments can't see each other's funding streams," McGowan explained.

Web QT is a query tool "that will allow you to look at all the grants at your institution and generate reports to us," McGowan explained. NIH will be able to create aggregate grant reporting, rather than individual grant process reports, making it easier to monitor the agency's grant portfolio, he said.

A version of Web QT will replace the current CRISP grants query system, so the public will be "able to search research abstracts in a much more user-friendly fashion," McGowan added.

-- Shirley Haley