



eRA Technical Coordinators

Date: July 15, 2004
Time: 1:30–3:00 p.m.
Location: 6700 B Rockledge Dr., Room 1205
Chair: Chip Groh

Next Meeting: August 19, Thursday. Location TBA

Action Items

1. (All) Communicate any requests for small fixes or enhancements to the eRA system to Tim Twomey.
2. (Tim Twomey) Contact Michael Loewe and follow-up on whether Grants Management is working to “sweep clean” inactive grants; update the eRA Technical Coordinators group.
3. (Tim Twomey) Coordinate presentation on eRA Data Mart for the next eRA Technical Coordinators meeting.
4. (Chip Groh) Publicize agenda for the next eRA Technical Coordinators meeting to a non-information technology but influential audience.

eRA Updates

Tim Twomey

Migration to J2EE—Tim Twomey reported that Kumaran, the company charged with implementing eRA’s plan to migrate all client-server applications to a Web-based platform known as J2EE, had delivered last week the first products relating to the conversion of User Administration and Grants Management client-server applications to J2EE applications. Tim reported that the applications look very nice but don’t function as well. The products came in with more bugs than anticipated and Kumaran is fixing them fast. Hopefully, the fixes will help Kumaran learn lessons and do better the next time around. The project to get NIH out of the client-server business and on to a Web-based platform is a huge operational and technical business and Kumaran is pushing hard. The schedule is ambitious: User Administration will be available in a few weeks for early testers. As for Grants Management, assuming things go well right up to the end of the year, the schedule calls for the Grants Management client-server to be shut down Jan.1, 2005.

Lock-in problems—Tim reported that Peer Review experienced a number of lock-in problems affecting quite a few applications in recent weeks. Operations reported this as an issue back in October but it was not really acted upon until now. Maintenance has identified the source of the problem as a coding issue—when reviewers were calculating scores, the whole table was getting locked up. Anywhere from 10 people to sixty people were locked up for minutes at a time. Some steps were taken to alleviate the problem such as cutting down the size of the history of score tables and deleting scores more than a year old. That cut down the calculation time from 6-8

minutes to four minutes. Tim said it looked like a simple fix and expressed optimism that the problem will be completely solved.

Maintenance contract renewed—Tim said that eRA has renewed the maintenance contract for existing applications for a period of two years that started July 1. Given that this contract is for two years compared to six months for the previous one, it would provide some stability to operations. Twomey said he could try and facilitate requests from ICs for small fixes or enhancements that involved less than 150 hours of labor.

Action: (All) Communicate any requests for small fixes or enhancements to the eRA system to Tim Twomey.

Sweeping inactive grants—Carol Martin of NHGRI reiterated the problem of old grants that have not been funded but remain recorded in the system. She said a grants specialist received an email from a university official about a grant that dated back to 2002 that was still listed as “pending” in the NIH eRA Commons and wanted to know how to change it. Twomey explained that every grant that is not paid is listed as “pending.” He said it is up to Grants Management to make a final decision on whether to sweep the system on a regular basis to clear old records. Grants Management had talked about the issue but not made any decision yet. Once they approve it, a schedule can be implemented. If someone is complaining about one item, it is easy to go in and clean it up. The group said that a process needs to be in place to allow individual institutions to clean up those records. Tim said he would follow up with Michael Loewe, Advocate of the Grants Management Lead Users, who was initially assigned the action item of cleaning up “pending” grants.

Action: (Tim Twomey) Contact Michael Loewe and follow-up on whether Grants Management is working to “sweep clean” inactive grants; update the eRA Technical Coordinators group.

Possible Data Mart presentation—In response to interest expressed in the eRA Data Mart, Tim said he would try and line up the right people for a presentation and update at the next meeting. An internal prototype of the data mart is slated to be released at the end of August with production scheduled for the first quarter of 2005. The eRA data mart will contain crucial grants data from different systems that will be periodically updated and will serve as a goldmine of information for various institutes.

Action: (Tim Twomey) Coordinate presentation on eRA Data Mart for the next eRA Technical Coordinators meeting.

Future Role of eRA Technical Coordinators Group

Chip Groh

The role of the eRA Technical Coordinators Group needs to be revamped given the proposed migration of client-server applications to the Web-based J2EE platform. While previous issues--such as client-servers blowing up every month or dramatic changes in configuration--required a lot of technical input from the group, that was going to be less and less the case in future. The group would have less direct input and control over tech issues in the coming months. He expressed the hope that the group would not “fade off into the sunset.” Chip suggested that the group morph into a sounding board for larger issues and expand its membership to include non-

technical people. Tim seconded that notion. As a user support, help desk specialist, Tim needs feedback on what people are thinking. Carol Martin also agreed that in opening the group to non-IT people, any suggestions to eRA would not be perceived simply as grousing by tech people. Chip agreed that a wider audience funneling back suggestions to eRA would be a good idea. The group suggested that Chip advertise the agenda of the next eRA Technical Coordinators to a wider, appropriate audience.

Action: (Chip Groh) Publicize agenda for the next eRA Technical Coordinators meeting to a non-information technology but influential audience.