eRA Technical Coordinators

Date: August 19, 2004
Time: 1:30–3:00 p.m.
Location: 6700 B Rockledge Dr., Room 1205
Chair: Chip Groh

Next Meeting: Oct. 21 (There will be no meeting in September)

Action items:

1. (Tim Twomey) Get back to CDC's Teresa Kinley on solutions to their system performance issues, including putting in a dedicated line for them.

2. (All) Email Tim or Chip Groh in advance of the Oct. 21 meeting with issues you would like to discuss or questions you would like answered at that meeting.

eRA Project Updates

Tim Twomey

Tim gave the group a progress report on projects underway at eRA:

Migration to J2EE—Tim reported that both User Administration and Grants Management programs are in integration testing. Kumaran Systems Inc., an application migration and reengineering company, is conducting the pilot for converting these client-server applications to web applications and then migrating the applications to a Web-based platform known as J2EE.

A few iterations remain to be done with GM although the critical bugs are out. Tim stated that he is hopeful that they will be able to get the products out to users pretty soon for a pilot. eRA is still on track for shutting down the Grants Management client-server early next year and using the web-only GM. eRA is continuing to evaluate the progress of this pilot; that evaluation is not finished. The goal is to convert all client-server applications to Web-based applications by the end of 2005.

Meanwhile, Blueprint Technologies has been contracted to document all old applications like GM.

10G Migration update—eRA is migrating its Oracle 9i database and application servers to the Oracle 10G grid computing Real Application Clusters (RAC). This migration will allow for more flexibility and better performance. For instance, if there is a spike in usage of the website, the system will allow additional underused machines to be added to the mix.

The schedule is to start in the development environment next week (the week of Aug. 23). Database migration is expected to take place Nov. 15. Two weeks later, the RAC will be in place. The 10G/RAC will be deployed to the staging environment Oct. 29, followed by incremental builds along the way. Tim described it as a pretty aggressive schedule, with migration slated to be completed by November.

Maintenance contract—A handful of deployments were scheduled for this week (week of Aug. 19) on Commons. They include a mandatory update to the Just-in-Time mailers requested by Extramural Program Management Committee in a new version of the Review Module (REV) and non-mandatory updates to Crisp Plus, ICO, the WEB Query Tool and the Grant Snapshot Report. Tim stated that there is also one RoadMap change that will involve a backend fix to Grants Management. This will put a blinking RoadMap alert on top of a Notice of Grant Award (NGA). In addition, eRA is making big changes to the way it stores documents –moving from big directories to multiple directories for ease of storage and retrieval. A big deployment–Commons Maintenance Package 2.6.4–is also set for testing Aug. 27 after being delayed in July. This will include an enhancement that will enable Commons users to easily self register for the Electronic Streamlined Non-Competing Award Process (it is a long, cumbersome sign up process right now), an improvement that is expected to greatly increase the number of eSNAPS.

CGAP—Two pilots were completed in June and July. Seventeen grant applications came in on June 1 and another 14 in July (7 amended, 6 new and one full budget). Another pilot is scheduled for October with Grants.gov. However, this will involve fake test data because all forms were not in place and eRA is leery of going live without them. The October pilot will be a prelude to a live pilot planned for February 2005. A task order for Commons expansion includes a new addition for Grants Closeout. This addition will enable grantees to see in Commons which grants are in closeout and when reports are due. In an aside, Tim noted that CGAP's name has been changed to eCGAP (electronic Competitive Grants Application Process).

DCIS—Contracts data is being moved from Department Contracts Information System (the HHS repository of all NIH contracting information) to IMPAC II. Tim stated that users should not count on the data being ready for end of year reporting because the data will be in but will not have been tested. It will not be ready for production until mid to late December.

iEdison— This program for reporting inventions that are government funded was created outside of the eRA system. Two separate contractors are working on trying to get iEdison into the eRA system. iEdison is on Sequent servers that will be migrated on to the Oracle framework. The goal is to get iEdison stable in the next few weeks.

Moving to Clearcase—eRA is moving from the CVS/PVCS document storage system to the ClearCase storage system which Tim described as high cost and high maintenance. ClearCase is part of IBM's Rational line of products. Tim described this change as a major back-end project not visible to users.

Collexis—Tim said that a prototype for disease coding using Collexis, licensed software that helps mine intelligent information from structured and unstructured data, is ready and will be shown to NIH director Dr. Elias Zerhouni in September. Seven institutes are involved in the prototype and it may be eventually expanded to include all ICs. The software will initially be used for disease coding – classifying diseases according to a certain number – that will, for instance, enable automatic assignment of grants to a certain disease category. Collexis works by extracting key information from data and then generating a "fingerprint" or profile. That profile can help in many ways, such as enabling scientists to analyze trends. Steve Hughes noted that Collexis represents just one aspect of Knowledge Management – which basically means organizing and using unstructured data in an intelligent way by identifying patterns and establishing relationships. In addition to disease coding, eRA hopes to put the technology to other uses. Tim noted that there is a task order for an electronic notification system for automatic

assignment, receipt and referral. Tim noted that they had just started evaluating the tools. More is on the radar.

Workflow products—eRA is currently evaluating some workflow products. Steve Hughes stated that he would be able to talk more about the products once the Request for Information (RFI) is complete. Right now, the issue is procurement sensitive.

Data Mart presentation

Steve Hughes

Steve gave a presentation on eRA's Data Mart, a database of information modeled on one created at the National Cancer Institute. eRA has taken the NCI data mart design, taken the NCI data out and placed the eRA data in. A pilot of the Data Mart, with a limited set of information, will be hopefully available for users to try in October. It will include all IMPAC II data since 1994 for grants and applications, protocols, studies and profiles of Grants Management Officers, Project Officers, etc. He provided a thick handout that listed all the items that will be available in the Data Mart at this time. Steve noted that it would not be a data dump, but a repository of information that could provide analytical documents in response to queries. Currently, eRA has two databases – the OLTP (OnLine Transaction Processing) holds operational data, while the IRDB (IMPAC II Reporting DataBase) contains historical data. The eRA Data Mart will be more sophisticated, offering up function specific analytical data to users. Steve stated that down the road the IRDB may no longer be a source that eRA will want to use, but he stated that he can make the commitment that IRDB will not go away until the need for it goes away.

Steve stated that his expectation is that the Data Mart will be able to spew out reports and answers to queries in under one minute. The data is expected to be updated hourly. He thanked the many people who had made this pilot possible including his deputy and task order manager Tracy Soto, IBM/Ekagra's Kalpesh Patel, the NCI Data Mart creators and group participants like Carol Martin who gave him a good hard evaluation of the system.

Tech talk

System Performance issues--CDC's Teresa Kinley, who teleconferenced into the meeting from Atlanta, stated that the system performance issues they had back in June were continuing. A lot of people at CDC were complaining about these problems, especially because it is occurring near the end of their fiscal year. Tim stated that he had heard some solutions floated, including having a dedicated line for CDC, and would follow up on that.

Action: (Tim Twomey) Get back to CDC's Teresa Kinley on solutions to their system performance issues, including putting in a dedicated line for them.

Future Role of eRA Technical Coordinators Group—At the previous meeting, there had been a discussion of revamping the role of the eRA Technical Coordinators Group. Chairman Chip Groh had told the group that given the proposed migration of client-server applications to the Web-based J2EE platform, the group would have less direct input and control over tech issues in the coming months. Steve advised members of the group that in changing their scope, they should make sure they do not lose their stature as a separate voice for the technical community. He noted that he had started the group years ago because he realized that the ADP/EP (ADP/Extramural

Programs) committee was spending a lot of time discussing things that were not technical in nature and that technology specialists needed their own forum. He noted that even though client-server applications will eventually be retired, other technical issues will surface – such as web interfaces and web authentication.

Alabama bound—Steve announced that even though he is moving to Alabama at the end of this month, he will continue to work for eRA. He thanked the group and told them that although he would try to physically attend the occasional meeting, he would mainly be participating via teleconference or videoconference.

Next meeting—Chip stated that there will be no meeting in September because everyone will be knee deep in end-of-the-fiscal-year stuff. He urged group members to email Tim or himself with issues they would like to discuss or questions they need answered at the October 21 meeting.

Action: (All) Email Tim or Chip Groh with issues you would like to discuss or questions you would like answered at the next meeting