



Commons Working Group (CWG) Minutes

Date: Wednesday, January 26, 2011
Location: Hotel George
15 E Street NW
Washington, DC 20001
Meeting Chair: Megan Columbus
Next Meeting: TBD

Action Items

1. eSubmission Update

- Communications staff will rework the “on-time submission” language and update the language in all appropriate places, including in the eSubmission FAQs.

2. Project Status Reports from Policy Staff

- Scarlett and her team will investigate the technical possibility of allowing institutions to “turn off” the Commons option (electronic receipt of Type 3 applications).
- NIH will prepare screenshots to bring to the next meeting (electronic receipt of Type 3 applications).

3. Potential for Improving Delegations

- Volunteers should submit a paragraph or two describing how modifying the delegation process will help reduce administrative burden.

4. Usability of Commons Home Page / Login Changes

- NIH will evaluate the comments received, incorporate the suggestions wherever possible, and send out updated screenshots as soon as possible.

5. Referral Correspondence in Commons Status

- NIH will take the comments back to eRA and the Division of Receipt and Referral (DRR), evaluate them, and keep CWG informed of any changes to the proposed screenshot/flow.

6. General Discussion:

- NIH will investigate why the member’s institution is no longer receiving the e-mail notifications that the application has been assigned to a study section.

eSubmission Update

Presenters: Sheri Cummins & Megan Columbus

Handout: NIH eRA eSubmission Update

Summary:

- **Reminders:**
 - [NOT-OD-11-007](#) and [NOT-OD-11-008](#): K, F, T and D applications now must come in on Adobe B1 forms. All other applications must come in on B1 forms after May 7, 2011.
 - Grants.gov no longer requires a DUNS number on the Project/Performance Site Location(s) form, but the DUNS is still a requirement for NIH and is enforced with an error.
 - Contact e-mail on the SF 424 (R&R) is no longer required by NIH. If the field is left blank or the e-mail entered is improperly formatted, NIH will use the AOR's e-mail address from box 19 in its place.
 - [NOT-OD-10-140](#): A2 applications can no longer be submitted to NIH. A1s must be submitted no later than 37 months from the original application submission.
- **Upcoming:**
 - [NOT-OD-11-036](#): Reference letters will be due by the application due date starting April 8, 2011 for F applications and June 12, 2011 for K applications.
 - [NOT-OD-11-039](#): Upcoming page limits effective May 25, 2011 and beyond for plans for instruction in the Responsible Conduct of Research
 - [NOT-OD-11-048](#): Single project U01s transitioning to electronic submission as of May 25, 2011 and beyond. Multi-project U01s will be moved to different activity codes.
 - Multiple activity codes on a single funding opportunity announcement (FOA)? It remains to be seen (for budget reasons), whether eRA will be able to implement this. If it is possible, we would differentiate application forms packages by using the Competition ID field, which will indicate the name of the forms package, as well as the activity code. We will also implement a Web service for S2S users that will provide FOA information, including which activity code is associated with a particular package for a FOA.
- **Update on eSubmission of complex applications:**
 - eRA Program Manager Oliver "Pete" Morton provided background on NIH's decision to move forward with building its own system for accepting complex applications electronically. NIH has had many conversations with Grants.gov. Megan indicated that we are not aiming to build a "new Grants.gov;" rather, we want to communicate with Grants.gov regarding the requirements they would want to see in a system that NIH builds and that Grants.gov could hopefully take over in the future. We want to build something that is expandable, able to accommodate other agencies' requirements, and that will meet our own needs as soon as possible.

- Working toward an online system that would allow multiple people to work on an application at once and to save works-in-progress.
- Institutions are finding that people are confusing the application viewing window with the (eliminated) error correction window. The on-time submission language should be reworked and replaced throughout the NIH websites.
- See the NIH eRA eSubmission Update handout for complete details of the eSubmission Update.

Action Items:

- Communications staff will rework the “on-time submission” language and update the language in all appropriate places, including in the eSubmission FAQs. Institutions are finding that people are confusing the application viewing window with the (eliminated) error correction window.

Project Status Reports from Policy Staff

Presenters: Emily Linde, Carol Wigglesworth & Dave Curren

Summary:

- **Research Performance Progress Report (RPPR):**
 - There is a federal-wide effort to develop a uniform progress report for all government agencies that fund research.
 - The Office of Management and Budget (OMB) and the Office of Science and Technology Policy (OSTP) published the final format (largely based on the National Science Foundation (NSF) progress report) in January 2010 and directed the agencies to post their implementation plans in January 2011.
 - NIH's draft implementation plan can be found here: http://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/rppr/agency_imp/nih.pdf.
 - Tentative timeline: NIH's anticipates to pilot RPPR in the Commons for all grant mechanisms (including complex) in January 2012 and to mandate use for all users in summer of 2012.
 - Carol, Emily and others are looking at leveraging Electronic Streamlined Non-competing Award Process (eSNAP); if the group has any issues with the current eSNAP functionality, they should get in touch with Carol or Emily.
 - While the goal is to make sure that we do not request extraneous information, some new information may be requested in the form (i.e., the NIH director has indicated interest in gathering more data on foreign awards).
- **Federal Financial Report (FFR):**
 - The NIH pilot was successful, with 1,400 FFR submissions received up to approximately one month before CWG.
 - Beginning February 1, 2011, NIH implemented the expenditure data portion of the Federal Financial Report (FFR) in the eRA Commons. All NIH Commons-registered organizations must use the FFR to report expenditure data. See [NOT-OD-11-017](#).
 - The group noted a long-term need to be able to upload a data set, instead of keying in data.

- Marcia noted that due to its age, the Payment Management System (PMS) cannot be used as the front-end system.
- **Type 7s (Change of Institution applications):**
 - The eRA system will be ready to accept Type 7 applications through Grants.gov in February 2011, but the system required for post-submission functionality is not yet complete.
 - Aiming to accept electronic Change of Institution applications in spring/summer 2011.
 - FOA will be a single FOA with multiple application packages. Forms within the application packages will be subject to minimum validations.
 - Another aspect NIH still has to “iron out” is how to handle institution changes prior to the awarding of the grant.
 - Paper transfers will still exist for complex mechanisms until we have a way to accept complex applications electronically.
- **Type 3s (Administrative Supplements):**
 - We’ll be accommodating both a Grants.gov forms-based and an eRA Commons solution for accepting these applications electronically. We predict that approximately 70 to 85% of the applications we currently receive could come in in the future through the Commons option.
 - Users will always be able to use the Grants.gov method for supplements to activity codes submitted electronically but would only be able to use the Commons method based on certain parameters. The Commons method would accommodate simple supplements, such as requests for equipment or supplies or the addition of a person to the grant award.
 - At Grants.gov, we would post a parent FOA, applicable to any non-complex grant type, which would contain all of the forms that would be necessary for any grant type.
 - The institutions (Signing Officials) would like to know if they would have the opportunity to “turn off” the Commons option for their institution.

Action Items:

- Scarlett and her team will investigate the technical possibility of allowing institutions to “turn off” the Commons option (electronic receipt of Type 3 applications).
- NIH will prepare screenshots to bring to the next meeting (electronic receipt of Type 3 applications).

eRA Commons Update

Presenter: Scarlett Gibb

Handout: eRA Commons Update

Summary:

- See the eRA Commons Update handout for details.

Potential for Improving Delegations

Presenters: Scarlett Gibb & Sheri Cummins

Summary:

- Currently, PD/PIs have to go into every Commons module to assign delegates for each module. In the future, eRA would like to have one Commons module where a PD/PI can do all of his or her delegations.
- Pete, Scarlett and Sheri asked the group for volunteers to assist NIH in justifying the need for improving the delegation process.
- Pete noted that as part of the budget process, we have to justify a positive return on investment, and input from institutions will boost eRA's leverage.

Action Items:

- Volunteers should submit a paragraph or two describing how modifying the delegation process will help reduce administrative burden at their institutions.

Usability of Commons Home Page / Login Changes

Presenters: Scarlett Gibb & Adam Levy

Handouts: Screenshot samples: possible Commons home page and Personal Profile Summary. Slides: Login to eRA Commons for External Users

Summary:

- **Screenshot samples for Commons:**
 - The group liked the descriptions in the right hand column of the Personal Profile Summary screenshots, saying that they hope the descriptions will reduce questions.
 - Suggestions for screens:
 - ✓ Remove Primary Features of the Commons from the home page.
 - ✓ Make the Help icon more prominent.
 - ✓ Condense the Contact information; the Contact links appear multiple times.
 - ✓ The group suggested that the Personal Profile Summary be the landing page only when portions of the PPF are incomplete. Otherwise, consider allowing users to choose their landing page.
- **Two-factor authentication at NIH:**
 - NIH has a requirement to transition to two-factor authentication for all NIH systems. Two-factor authentication means that users log into NIH systems using two separate credentials—something they know (e.g., a username/password combination) and something they have (e.g., an ID card).
 - NIH's Center for Information Technology is developing universal landing pages that everyone (internal and external users) will encounter when logging into NIH systems, including eRA Commons.
 - The group indicated how burdensome and confusing the proposed login changes would be for eRA Commons users. Pete will use their feedback as leverage to work with the appropriate groups to make login changes as seamless as possible for eRA's external customers.

Action Items:

- NIH will evaluate the comments received, incorporate the suggestions wherever possible, and send out updated screenshots as soon as possible.

Referral Correspondence in Commons Status

Presenters: Scarlett Gibb & Sheri Cummins

Handout: Screenshot of possible changes to Correspondence portion of Other Relevant Documents on *Status Information* screen

Summary:

- The Division of Receipt and Referral (DRR) at the Center for Scientific Review wants to cut down on the amount of paper mail it uses to keep institutions updated on various items. eRA put together a screenshot of how the new referral correspondence could potentially work.
- Examples of correspondence include: Problems assigning an application; notification that the applicant submitted an A2 application
- Right now it is just DRR that is looking at doing this, but once the functionality is in place, other groups at NIH may wish to communicate with applicants/grantees this way. DRR will use this functionality for mainly pre-assignment correspondence.
- The correspondence items will be visible to delegates.
- Feedback, comments and suggestions from the group:
 - Title the link in such a way that users know it is pre-assignment and not post-award communications.
 - Send out a “ping” e-mail that there is correspondence for the user to view in Commons.
 - Read vs. Unread functionality: The group would like the system to somehow indicate that there is unread correspondence. Suggestions include indicating the number of unread messages next to the Correspondence link, or indicating the date of the most recent item, without the user having to click on the Correspondence link.

Action Items:

- NIH will take the comments back to eRA and DRR, evaluate them, and keep CWG informed of any changes to the proposed screenshot/flow.

General Discussion

Summary:

- A group member noted that her institution is no longer receiving the e-mails that an application has been assigned to a study section.

Action Items:

- NIH will investigate why the member’s institution is no longer receiving the e-mail notifications that the application has been assigned to a study section.