



eRA SBIR Partnership Meeting Minutes

Date: Wednesday, Nov. 5, 2003
Time: 9:00 a.m.–Noon
Location: Rockledge 1, Fifth Floor Conference Room
Chair: Scarlett Gibb

Action Items

1. (Scarlett Gibb) Contact Charlie Havekost regarding adding a government-wide profile system on Grant.gov's list of priorities.
2. (Scarlett Gibb) Implement communication plan to educate PIs on what to expect when submitting an electronic grant application.
3. (JJ Maurer) Develop a solution for granting SBIRs the ability to validate the data entered in an electronic grant application.
4. (SBIRs) Direct Principal Investigators to David Wright if they have concerns or questions regarding the NIH electronic grant application policy.
5. (JJ Maurer, Scarlett Gibb) Incorporate SBIRs into the eRA process, including Helpdesk response mechanisms, eRA change requests, and relevant eRA email; consider the appointment of an SBIR Advocate responsible for presenting SBIR change requests to the internal board.
6. (JJ Maurer) Verify the maximum number of characters permitted in the *Title* field and update SBIRs.
7. (SBIRs) Include biosketch header information only on the first biosketch attachment for a person (not on subsequent attachments) for the November pilot; contact Mike Goodman with questions or concerns.

CGAP Update

Lana Diggs, Lead Analyst for the Competing Grants Applications (CGAP) project in eRA, presented a high-level overview of the CGAP project: (http://era.nih.gov/Docs/CGAP_Process.pdf). She reviewed the CGAP end-to-end and back-office processes, emphasizing that data entry at the NIH is no longer required.

Next week, signatures will be possible on applications. If Principal Investigators (PIs) and Signing Officials (SOs) do not verify their applications, they will be asked to submit paper applications. Without verification, no one at NIH can view applications. Lana explained that currently there is a 24-hour delay from the time that grantees submit their applications to application verification. This delay is a result of a technical problem that Lana plans to remedy soon.

Lana continues to test CGAP and support Service Providers. JJ Maurer said that only fixes to ensure stability will be included in the February release; there will be no new features or forms. He said that the NIH has not definitely committed to a February release because of contract

changeovers; JJ asked the group to be cognizant of this transition. However, JJ intends to follow his initial plan to open the production system for the pilot by January 15 and shut it down on February 2. Finally, he encouraged limiting the number of pilot users to prevent overextending the system.

CGAP Pilot Feedback

JJ Maurer asked the group for feedback concerning the CGAP pilot. The group provided the following comments:

- *Personal Profile*—The information requested in the personal profile on the paper application is different than the information requested in the personal profile in the NIH eRA Commons. JJ Maurer said that this is a primary concern that may involve policy changes.
- *Key Personnel*—The group requested guidance on defining key personnel. David Wright said that this was an issue discussed during the last Commons Working Group (CWG) meeting. David explained that attendees at that meeting did not want to complete a different profile for each government agency. He emphasized the need for a centralized, government-wide profile system. He suggested contacting Charlie Havekost to see if this could be included on his list of Grants.gov priorities. JJ said the NIH will develop an interim solution in the meantime.
- *Biographical and Science Sketches*—Breaking up the biographical and science sketches into separate sections has proven cumbersome. Grantees are confused by the separate sections and are struggling to submit information in a piecemeal fashion while still meeting page requirements. JJ suggested that the problem may not be with CGAP but with grantees who are not accustomed to submitting grant applications via electronic forms. This is a “change in culture” not a flaw in the system. It was suggested that eRA better communicate this “new way of doing things” to Principal Investigators (PIs). The group recommended posting instructions or tips on how to submit an electronic grant application on the Grants.gov Web site, the NIH Web site, the NIH eRA Commons Web site, and the eRA Web site. These instructions should clarify how PIs should enter data into electronic forms so that they meet application requirements. Scarlett Gibb volunteered to remedy these communication gaps. Finally, the SBIR partners explained that they were confused about the policy concerning page limitations on applications. Initially, they thought there was no policy; then a policy was enforced halfway through the pilot. They asked that eRA better communicate policy changes in the future.
- *Validation of DUNS and EIN numbers*—Currently, SBIR partners have no way to determine if the Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) and Employee Identification Number (EIN) numbers are correct on submitted applications. There is no way to check this data against the eRA database. JJ said that granting SBIRs access to the database is currently not an option. David suggested providing access, if not to the tables, then to non-sensitive data. JJ said that this may be an option but will investigate a more concrete solution.
- *Grantee Perception of Electronic Submission*—Several SBIR partners agreed that there is a common misperception in the grantee community that submitting a grant electronically

will hurt their chances for funding. Many PIs have asked if they also could submit a paper copy in addition to an electronic copy. David Wright explained that the grant policy and 398 statement are being revised to correct any misperceptions concerning electronic submission. The group asked David if he would be willing to talk with PIs who have concerns or questions regarding the NIH policy on electronic submission. David said that he would be happy to serve as a point of contact.

Finally, JJ asked the group whether a submitted application should be returned to the PI/SO if there are errors or if the application should be stored and then restored once the PI/SO remedies the errors. The group agreed that applications with errors should not be stored but returned to the PI/SO for correction. However, this only will work if the SBIRs can validate the data entered in the application. The SBIRs want to validate information as soon as possible, preferably before sending the applications to the NIH. JJ agreed that providing SBIRs the ability to validate data is essential.

Action: (Scarlett Gibb) Contact Charlie Havekost regarding adding a government-wide profile system on Grant.gov's list of priorities.

Action: (Scarlett Gibb) Implement a communication plan to educate PIs on what to expect when submitting an electronic grant application.

Action: (JJ Maurer) Develop a solution for granting SBIRs the ability to validate the data entered in an electronic grant application.

Action: (SBIRs) Direct Principal Investigators to David Wright if they have concerns or questions regarding the NIH electronic grant application policy.

Discussion

XML Error Messages. The SBIRs said that XML error messages often were cryptic and not helpful. JJ explained that remedying these error messages is a top priority.

Submitting Change Requests. JJ said that SBIRs should have an avenue for submitting change requests as well as viewing eRA's change requests. Scarlett recommended the appointment of an Advocate who collects SBIR change requests and presents them to the internal board. JJ agreed that an SBIR Advocate was a good suggestion. He emphasized the importance of including and integrating the SBIRs into the entire eRA process, not just the procedures for change requests. As an interim solution, Scarlett recommended that the SBIRs be privy to change-request emails as well as be incorporated into the Helpdesk process.

Title Field. The group asked how many characters are permitted in the Title field. Lana, JJ, and others were unsure and agreed to check the business rules.

Style Sheet for Converting the 424 to the 398. JJ announced that a style sheet is being created to convert 424 base schema to the 398. This should be ready in a few weeks.

Freeze on Type 1s. Development of Type 1s will freeze 1 p.m. on Thursday, November 6.

Submitting Applications to Production. On Monday, November 10, applications submitted to the NIH by SBIRs will be sent into production.

Action: (JJ Maurer, Scarlett Gibb) Incorporate SBIRs into the eRA process, including Helpdesk response mechanisms, eRA change requests, and relevant eRA email;

consider the appointment of an SBIR Advocate responsible for presenting SBIR change requests to the internal board.

Action: (JJ Maurer) Verify the maximum number of characters permitted in the *Title* field and update SBIRs.

Biosketch Attachments for November Pilot

Mike Goodman asked SBIRs to include the biosketch header information only on the *first* biosketch attachment for a person and not on subsequent attachments. If the biosketch header information appears on any attachment other than the first, it will appear twice in the final grant image and may create confusion when the application is reviewed, since it will look like a biosketch for another person is starting when, in fact, it is simply a section C (Research Support) for the same person. Mike distributed a handout with detailed procedures on handling biosketch attachments for the November pilot (<http://era.nih.gov/Docs/Biosketches.pdf>). He asked the group to contact him with any concerns or questions.

Action: (SBIRs) Include biosketch header information only on the first biosketch attachment for a person (not on subsequent attachments) for the November pilot; contact Mike Goodman with questions or concerns.