Commons Working Group (CWG) Minutes

Date: Tuesday, January 26, 2010
Location: Hyatt Regency Washington
                400 New Jersey Avenue, NW
                Washington, DC 20001
Meeting Chair: Megan Columbus
Next Meeting: TBD

Action Items

1. eRA Commons Update

- An updated help file is needed for the post-doc role. One user noted that the system isn't recognizing that if someone is a post-doc, they can have PI rights as well. Scarlett thinks the system does allow you to be both a PI and a post-doc and will look into the issue.

- Ideally, the Closeout option should show up at least 90 days prior to the day that the closeout needs to be completed. NIH staff must take action in order for the link to appear. Dave Curren will look into links for ARRA closeouts; users are starting to close out their ARRA reports.

2. Status Check on Mandating Electronic Submission of xTrain, Just-in-time, eSNAP, No-cost Extension & Closeout

- In xTrain, the PI of the grant must assign an assistant, and in most cases, the assistant is the individual working with the forms. Currently, the SO cannot delegate, only the PI can. The SO needs to contact the PI, re-set the password and then lead the PI through the delegation. The group requests that the PI can assign delegation to his or her assistant.

- The group asked if we can have a single screen where PIs can do all of their delegations, for MYBIB, eSNAP, etc., instead of a different screen for each delegation, especially since PIs typically delegate these responsibilities to the same person. Scarlett and her team will look into this.

3. Electronic Submission Considerations for Administrative Supplements (Type 3s) & Changes of Institution (Type 7s)

- A number of members (see List of Attendees) have volunteered to participate in a smaller group discussion on approaches for the transition of Type 7s (to be coordinated by Emily Linde) between this meeting and the next.

4. eRA Web site Redesign

- Electronic mockups of the four proposed pages will be sent to the group.
- Sarah will make sure that the eRA Communications team retains the current Web site's information in the redesign of the pages.

eRA Commons Update

Presenter: Scarlett Gibb

Summary:

- **Summary of Commons releases:**
  - **October 2009:** Commons supports Early Stage Investigator status for applicants and grantees. PIs can see if they have Early Stage eligibility and can enter their medical residency, update their profile, and ESI status will update automatically. Scarlett reminded the group that we recommend PIs do this prior to submitting an application.
  - **January 2010:** Introduced multiple Human Assurance Numbers, which will be linked into Just-in-time reports (JITs). Added Notice of Award (NoA) e-mail as a mandatory field in the institutional registration process. Also introduced Continuous Submission indicators and identifiers.
  - **Future releases:** We will be prohibiting creation and usage of Basic Accounts (deleting current Basic Accounts), implementing multi-PI capability in various modules (Closeout and xTrain), continuing to work on the MY BIB & My NCBI publication integration (MY BIB tool was released on 1/25/2010), and investigating Financial Status Report (FSR) to Federal Financial Report (FFR) conversion.
- Scarlett reported that the Commons Usability Study is progressing well.
- **Framework/infrastructure upgrade (Adam Levy):** Commons is one of the oldest applications in eRA, so we want to get it up to speed with the rest of the eRA systems, have the ability to make changes on demand, and move toward the federally mandated Single-Sign-On environment, which we would like to get to in the next few years.
- We are working on finalizing an updated Commons User Guide and continuing to work on Commons help files and 508 Compliance.
- Megan asked the group how many people use the eRA documentation on how to use each application: do they refer people to it, or do they mostly see that people are self-teaching? The group noted that xTrain training resources are going to be very important, and multiple individuals noted the importance of concentrating as much on resources as on communications. Scarlett explained that we are looking at creating animated self-training xTrain tools that will be broken up by task.

Action Items:
- An updated help file is needed for the post-doc role. One user noted that the system isn't recognizing that if someone is a post-doc, they

Status Check on Mandating Electronic Submission of xTrain, Just-in-time, eSNAP, No-cost Extension & Closeout

Presenter: Megan Columbus

Summary:

- **xTrain:** User guide and training components need to be good to go before we mandate xTrain use. Get the word out now that use will be mandated in Jan. 2010, so users can try making summer appointments in the system. Several members noted that they are receiving requests from NIH staff for information that they have already entered into xTrain; they have to print out and mail the originals. Marcia confirmed that the only original document that needs to be printed and mailed is the signed payback agreement from post-docs.
- **Just-in-time:** JIT use can be mandated once we refine the times when the link is visible. Currently the link is made available for many more applications than require submission of JIT information. The institutes also need to be able to open a JIT link for a specific record. We also need to change the automatic notification triggers to avoid program officials contacting PIs directly for JIT information. What triggers the official e-mail is different from what triggers the link in Commons, and institutes have no control over the automatically system-generated e-mail. An attachment/upload capability is not thought to be a showstopper.
- **eSNAP:** No showstopper to mandating its use, and several institutions internally mandated eSNAP use years ago.
- **No-cost Extension:** The group needs to be able to choose the number of months—1 through 12, instead of 6, 9, or 12—before we mandate use. Suzanne pointed out that to attempt to extend a grant solely because the competing grant hasn't gone through, yet there is no money left and no progress to be made in the original grant, is not an appropriate use of the No-cost Extension.
- **Closeout:** Marcia sees it as a showstopper for mandating use that xTrain and Closeout cannot accommodate multi-PIs. Scarlett suggested that we might switch the order of mandating xTrain and Closeout. Reprioritizing would need further discussion before any action is taken, particularly since work on enhancing Closeout for multiple PIs is already underway.

Action Items:

- The group asked if we can have a single screen where PIs can do all of their delegations, for MYBIB, eSNAP, etc., instead of a different screen for each delegation, especially since PIs typically delegate these responsibilities to the same person. Scarlett and her team will look into this.

Reference Letters

Presenter: Megan Columbus
Summary:

- Megan asked the group if there is anything that we can do differently to help with accurate and on-time reference letter submission, as it is difficult to communicate information about the submission of reference letters when NIH is not aware of who the referees are prior to their reference letter submission.
- Generally, the group said that it has not experienced many difficulties with reference letter submission. All agreed that as we move forward and applicants gain more experience with reference letters, less issues should arise.
- Suzanne pointed out two ongoing issues at Receipt and Referral with reference letters:
    - Many referees do not realize that they can submit their letters early; ideally, the reference letters are in the system and waiting for the application.
    - Occasionally, the FOA that the letter sites and the FOA that the application sites do not match. If they don't, Receipt and Referral sends the applicant to the eRA Help Desk.
- Scarlett reminded the group that in the January 2010 Commons release, enhancements to reference letters were deployed:
    - Referees now have to review reference letters (and replacement reference letters) before submitting them (per a pop-up that will open when the referee clicks "Submit").

Electronic Submission Considerations for Administrative Supplements (Type 3s) & Changes of Institution (Type 7s)

Presenters: Dave Curren (Type 3s) & Emily Linde (Type 7s), Office of Policy for Extramural Research
Presentation: Electronic Submission of Administrative Supplement and Change of Institution Requests
Summary: Collect feedback on proposed solutions for how to accept these applications electronically.

- **Type 3s (Dave Curren):**
    - **Potential solution 1:** Create a generic "Administrative Supplement" FOA in Grants.gov that applicants can use to request funds using the SF424 (R&R) package.
    - **Potential solution 2:** Create an eRA Commons module that can accept these requests and take advantage of existing grant data already in NIH systems.

- o **Discussion:**
  - o There were a variety of opinions but no one method was strongly preferred over another. The group's primary concern was that any eventual solution needs must accommodate system-to-system users.
  - o The group also raised the following questions/issues:
    - Is there a possibility for a short-term and a long-term plan of action, or do we have to choose one option now?
    - The option of exploring doing Commons at the same time as Grants.gov is attractive.
    - Commons has the advantage of data integrity and the ability to use grant data already existing in the system (SF424 R&R data cannot be reused for different opportunities in Grants.gov; the data does not transfer).
    - If the money is only available for one of the two options, we should proceed with Grants.gov for **Type 3s** in order to accommodate system-to-system users.
    - S2Sers want to keep the same schema.
- **Type 7s (Emily Linde):**
  - o **Potential solution 1:** Create a generic "Administrative Supplement" FOA in Grants.gov the new organizations can use to submit transfer applications using the SF424 (R&R) package, and create a module in the eRA Commons the old institution can use to submit the PHS 3734 Relinquishing Statement. A drawback to the Grants.gov solution is that budgets can't be submitted in non-modular increments to Grants.gov, and most Type 7s are no longer in modular increments.
  - o **Potential solution 2:** Create an eRA Commons module that can accept transfer applications from the new institution and PHS 3734 Relinquishing Statement from the old institution.
  - o **Discussion:** As with the Type 3 discussion, grantees would need a system-to-system solution, in order to accommodate their current workflows. The new grantee would require both notification of the submission of a relinquishing statement by the old institution and the ability to view the relinquishing statement.
    - o CWG members preferred the first potential solution over the second. The discussion was cut short and volunteers were requested for a small group to continue the discussion in greater detail (see Action Items).

Action Items:
- A number of members (see List of Attendees) have volunteered to participate in a smaller group discussion on approaches for the transition of Type 7s (to be coordinated by Emily Linde) between this meeting and the next.

eRA Web Site Redesign

Presenter: Megan Columbus

Handouts: Sample pages (current homepage, proposed homepage, proposed Applicants page & proposed Grantees page)

Summary:

- Currently, CWG members visit the eRA Web pages to check validations, find up-to-date Commons help, check the FAQs, get to the Commons via the eRA Commons button and view CWG information.
- Proposed pages were well received by CWGers, as the new content will support their efforts to train and assist members of their institutions.

Action Items:

- Electronic mockups of the four proposed pages will be sent to the group.
- Sarah will make sure that the eRA Communications team retains all of the above info in the redesign of the pages.