

NIH eRA eSubmission Items of Interest – April 19, 2009

Last Chance to Submit Early for NIH Challenge Grants

I was at an [NIH Regional Seminar on Program Funding and Grants Administration](#) last week and was reminded that “early” is a subjective term. Suggestions like “submit early” and “don’t wait until the last minute” mean different things to different folks. While I was equating “early” with submissions days in advance of the deadline, the phrase “*we were early, it was only 2 p.m.*” was a reality check that others may define “early” in terms of hours and take “last minute” to literally mean 4:59 p.m.

There are only five business days left before the April 27 deadline for [Recovery Act Limited Competition: NIH Challenge Grants in Health and Science Research \(RC1\)](#). The two days prior to large NIH deadlines are often nearly as busy as the deadline date itself. Quite a few applications for the Challenge Grant opportunity have already processed through to our Division of Receipt & Referral, but not enough to make a dent in the response we expect. I realize it isn’t any easier for you to prepare applications on short notice than it is for us to ready systems to handle significant changes in usage. So, I’ll leave it at – the earlier you submit the better.

Grants.gov to Provide New Tracking Tool

Starting Monday you’ll be able to take advantage of a new feature to quickly and efficiently track a submitted application, much like you track packages shipped through the postal service. The new “Track My Application” feature allows you to check the status of an application submission by using a link included in the initial receipt email received from Grants.gov and entering your Grants.gov tracking number. You don’t need to login to Grants.gov to use this feature, so Authorized Organization Representatives (AORs) are free to share the email and included link with others interested in tracking an application.

The Grants.gov team is working hard to improve the applicant experience. Keep an eye on the [Grants.gov Web site](#) – more changes to come.

eRA Changes Coming Soon!

New eRA Commons & eSubmission Features & Fixes will be released this week. Details of the release will be sent in a separate email. All eRA services will be unavailable between 8 p.m. Eastern Time on Thursday, April 23, and 7 a.m. Eastern Time on Friday, April 24. We realize it is extremely inconvenient to have an outage so close to important deadlines; however, many of the changes are needed to facilitate the processing of applications in response to the American Recovery & Reinvestment Act of 2009 (ARRA).

Terminology Reminders:

“On-time” Submission

- All registrations completed prior to submission deadline
- Successful submission to Grants.gov with timestamp on or before 5:00 p.m. local time of submitting organization on the due date
- Errors/warnings corrected and the submission process complete within the *error correction window* following the submission deadline

Error Correction Window

The *error correction window* is the period of time provided to correct errors and/or warnings in order to complete the submission process. The standard error correction window is two (2) business days, begins the day after the submission deadline and excludes weekends and standard federal holidays. All errors must be corrected to successfully complete the submission process. Warnings will not prevent the application from completing the submission process.

The following caveats apply:

- Initial application submission must be “on-time.”
- The AOR/institution is expected to enforce that application changes made within the window are restricted to those necessary to address system-identified errors/warnings. NIH may reject any application that includes additional changes.
- Proof of “on time” submission (e.g., Grants.gov timestamp & tracking number OR help desk ticket number with information verifying system issue outside your control) and description of all changes made within the window must be documented in PHS 398 Cover Letter component of the application.

Inquiring Minds Want to Know...

I've received the following questions recently and thought you all could benefit from the answers...

Q: What registration requirements are there for electronic submission of grant applications to NIH?

A: As noted in all NIH Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs), separate registrations in Grants.gov and eRA Commons are required in order to submit grant applications through Grants.gov to NIH. Someone with legal signature authority within an Organization must register their organization in both Grants.gov and eRA Commons. Principal Investigators also need an eRA Commons account (obtained through their organization), but do not register in Grants.gov. Allow 4 weeks or more to complete all registrations. For more information on registration, see http://era.nih.gov/ElectronicReceipt/files/registration_handout.pdf.

Q: After I hit the Sign & Submit button the “Processing, please don’t close the window until you receive confirmation.” message appears at the top of the Adobe forms? How long should I wait before I give up?

A: You should receive a confirmation screen and/or receipt email from Grants.gov within 15-20 minutes. If not, go ahead and abandon the submission, wait a little while and try again. Before attempting to submit again, always close and reopen the Adobe application if the “Processing” message is visible.

Q: How long after submission will I know if my application had any Grants.gov or eRA errors?

A: Grants.gov has a two (2) business day target for processing and NIH has a 1 business day target for processing. Under regular load, it is not unusual to have a response in a matter of hours. Under heavy load, you can expect Grants.gov processing times to be closer to that 48 hour target. Under extreme load, processing times may even exceed the target. Be patient. NIH will be monitoring processing times and will implement contingencies as needed.

Q: What do I do if a Grants.gov or eRA Commons system issue threatens my ability to submit my application “on time”?

A: Follow the process outlined at: http://era.nih.gov/ElectronicReceipt/app_help.htm.

Process summary:

- Contact appropriate [help desk](#) to try to get resolution
 - Take advantage of email and Web ticketing options at help desks to save time. Both Grants.gov and eRA allow you to group multiple Grants.gov tracking numbers or PI/application title combinations in a single ticket as long as all the submissions included in the ticket are experiencing the exact same symptoms
 - If working with Grants.gov, contact eRA help desk to document issue and steps taken toward resolution
 - If verified system issue, this documentation can be used in place of tracking # and timestamp as proof of "on time" submission
- Continue to work through submission issues to complete process within error correction window

- Document your issues and corrective actions including support ticket numbers in Cover Letter

Q: How important is the cover letter documentation?

A: Very important - applications submitted after the deadline that do not contain cover letters, appropriate help desk documentation of system issues, or that contain application changes outside of those needed to address system errors/warnings may be rejected as late by the Division of Receipt & Referral.

Every submission that is initiated after the submission deadline, including applications within the “error correction window,” must include a cover letter. Only the latest cover letter submitted will carry forward with your application. The single cover letter should document proof of “on time” submission of initial application, why the current submission was made after the deadline, any changes made to the application after the deadline and all additional information you wish to pass on to the Division of Receipt & Referral.

Q: I noticed that many opportunities expire the day after the submission deadline. How do applicants make corrective submissions to address eRA-identified errors/warnings during the “error correction window” when part of that window is after the opportunity has expired?

A: NIH posts all opportunities in a way that allows submissions through Grants.gov to continue for a short period of time following the expiration date. This grace period accommodates corrective submissions during the “error correction window,” late submissions allowed under NIH’s late policy (when applicable), and provides flexibility to NIH to institute contingency plans (e.g., extending deadlines or “error correction window”). The grace period allows applications to work through the systems; however, applications submitted during this period are accepted at NIH’s discretion.

Q: Does the NIH late policy apply to the NIH Challenge Grant FOA?

A: No. Requests for Applications (RFAs) and Program Announcements with Special Referral Considerations (PARs) with special receipt dates always must be submitted to Grants.gov by the dates designated in the announcement to be on time (see <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-08-027.html>).

Q: I have read notice [NOT-OD-09-058](#) and subsequent clarification [NOT-OD-09-079](#) in the NIH Guide for Grants & Contracts, but I am still confused over which budget form to use if I’m submitting a competitive Revision for Recovery Act funds. Can you clarify?

A: In general, competitive revisions should use the same budget form as the parent grant.

If the parent grant used the detailed R&R Budget form, then the competitive revision also must use the detailed R&R Budget form even if the request falls within the direct cost guidelines for PHS 398 Modular budget use. Some applicants may receive the following warning: “R01, R03, R21, R34, and U34 direct cost requests of \$250K or less each year (on the 424 RR Budget page section F-K) must be in modules of \$25K, using the PHS 398 Modular Budget Form and not the R&R Budget Form. Incorrect applications may be delayed in the peer review process or rejected.” The warning will not stop the application from moving on for further consideration.

If the parent grant used the PHS 398 Modular Budget form, the competitive revision should also use the modular format whenever possible. Since the cost limits of the original announcements may not apply for these special revisions, there may be cases when the revision request exceeds \$250K in a budget period and applicants are unable to use the PHS 398 Modular budget form despite its use in the parent grant. In these cases the R&R Budget form can be used (if available for that opportunity). Users may receive the following warning: “The parent grant for this revision uses the modular format; in most cases, this application should be submitted with a modular budget. If the budget caps permitted by the FOA exceed the modular limit of \$250k, the

application must be submitted with a detailed budget.” The warning will not stop the application from moving on for further consideration.

Although at time of submission the PHS 398 Modular budget form will be used by many applicants requesting Recovery Funds, detailed budget information may be requested after review and included with other Just-In-Time information (changes are being made to eRA Commons JIT functionality to allow for the collection of this information.)

Q: Why did I receive the error message “The parent grant for a revision must be awarded. The parent grant for this submission is not a funded grant.” for my competitive revision?

A: As indicated in the message, the most recent ‘New’ or competitive ‘Renewal’ application (known as the ‘parent grant’) must be in an awarded status at the time the ‘Revision’ is submitted. Other related conditions can also trigger this message. For example, if the proposed project dates of the ‘Revision’ fall outside the project start or end dates of the parent grant the system will not find an awarded grant covering the proposed dates and will throw the same error. If you receive this error and are unable to determine the root cause, you should contact the eRA Commons Help Desk. Be prepared to provide your Grants.gov tracking number (e.g., GRANT12345678) and the Institute and Serial number of your prior NIH grant number (e.g., CA123456).

Q: If my parent grant is not awarded by the submission deadline, can I wait to submit my revision?

A: No. It is important to meet the submission deadlines for all opportunities, but even more so for ARRA applications. There is no flexibility in the timeline for these applications. Every step in the process is under tremendous time constraints in order to get the applications in, assigned, reviewed and awarded.

Q: Can you do a revision where the end date falls outside of the parent project’s end date?

A: No. The dates for the revision must fall within the project period of the parent. If a No Cost Extension request is pending, that process must complete prior to submitting the revision.

Q: My revision application received the error message “The parent grant that has been entered is not associated with this PI.” Although the PD/PI listed was not part of the original grant, she is the current PD/PI on record. What do I do?

A: We have identified an issue with the eRA validations in this area. The system only checks the PD/PI of the parent award and does not account for changes in the PD/PI during non-competing years. You will need to contact the eRA Commons Help Desk for assistance.

Q: Why doesn’t the application image in eRA Commons always reflect my last submission?

A: The Grants.gov system does not know if multiple submissions from a specific Authorized Organization Representative or organization’s DUNS are for the same application or for completely separate applications. There are many servers at work processing applications. There is no guarantee that applications will be processed or queued up for agency retrieval in the order they are submitted. It is important to allow an application to work through the system before making a corrective submission for that same application.

This is especially important for NIH opportunities since having more than one application in the processing queue can lead to unexpected consequences. Consider this scenario...you submit your New application specifying “Application” in the Type of Submission field (box 1) of the SF424 (R&R) cover component. You quickly discover a mistake and before the initial application is processed you make a corrective submission marking “Changed/Corrected” in that same field just like the application guide (that you always have by your side for reference) indicates. NIH receives and processes the second application first. When your initial submission, the one marked “Application,” is processed you receive the following error “This application is a duplicate of a previous submission for the same council round. Please resubmit again using ‘Changed/Corrected Application’ Type of Submission on the SF424 RR cover page.” Being

patient and allowing applications to complete the process will save you time and frustration in the end. It also allows you to address additional errors caught by the systems.

Q: We have heard that Grants.gov sometimes provides erroneous messages. If my application is rejected at Grants.gov, should I ignore the message and just keep trying to submit the same application?

A: No. Although Grants.gov had an issue with conflicting/erroneous notification messages earlier in the year (see [Items of Interest from Jan. 7](#)), that issue has been resolved. The vast majority of messages sent by Grants.gov are now correct. We expect high demand for Grants.gov resources during the coming submission deadlines. Submitting the same application without taking any corrective action when errors are identified just adds additional load on the system. All error messages, whether provided by Grants.gov or eRA should be taken seriously. If you need help determining the appropriate course of action – contact the appropriate help desk.

Take care,

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Final Notes:

- Although you are welcome to send suggestions, feedback and general inquiries to us at askera@mail.nih.gov, all production issues must be reported through the [eRA Commons Help Desk](#). This ensures timely support and appropriate documentation of your issues.
- This message was sent to multiple listservs; you may receive it more than once – sorry for any inconvenience. To subscribe/unsubscribe to eRA listservs, please go to our [Get Connected](#)