NIH eSubmission Items of Interest – January 7, 2015

Happy New Year!
I hope everyone had a great holiday season. It's hard to believe we are in a new year already.

My predictions for 2015…
- I will remind applicants to submit early and check their application images in eRA Commons
- The late policy will be simplified
- Applicants will start using ASSIST to prepare and submit their single-project applications and love the pre-submission error checking and preview of their application image
- Participants at the NIH Regional seminars will impress their coworkers with their newly acquired knowledge of NIH grant processes
- Federal offices will close, yet I'll still be expected to work

Impressed with my insight? OK – I peeked in the NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts and spoke with some colleagues. But, since I'm on a roll, let me share some more details…

Don't Skip the Final Step in NIH's Application Submission Process
You spend months preparing your application. You get it to your Office of Sponsored Research by the internal due date. You get all the right sign-offs. It's submitted to Grants.gov early (way to go you). You're feeling good. You let out a sigh of relief. You're done…or are you? I'm really hoping you know the answer is - *no, of course, you're not done.*

Submitting to Grants.gov is not the final step in the application submission process. You are not 'done' until you can view every part of that submitted application in eRA Commons. Please, please, please (yes, I'm begging here) – please remember to track your applications in eRA Commons. Correct any identified errors and carefully check your assembled application image.

We have received a few recent cases of error-free applications showing all indications that everything is good – no errors identified, a temporary NIH application number assigned, and 'happy path' notifications sent. There is just one (not so small) clue that something is wrong. When you try to click on the eApplication link in eRA Commons you get a blank screen. The application you worked so hard on doesn't appear. Here's the thing – we didn't hear about the first case of this issue from an applicant. We heard about it from our Center for Scientific Review which means the applicant never took advantage of the two-day viewing window to look at their application in eRA Commons. This issue isn't cause for panic – we've only seen a few isolated cases and we are now monitoring for it, proactively restoring any missing application images we find, working with impacted applicants and developing a fix. It is, however, a good reminder of the importance of checking your application image and notifying the help desk if you encounter any issues.

Don't skip that final step. You've heard me say it before (but it's the first time in 2015) – **If you can't VIEW it, then we can't REVIEW it!**

The NIH Late Policy for Application Submission Simplified
Sometimes, despite all the good planning and intentions in the world, circumstances simply prevent the on-time submission of a grant application. Let's say Ray, an AOR, is waiting to receive the final specific aims and research strategy from Susie, the PD/PI. He calls Susie to remind her that the files are needed in order to submit the application with enough time to

correct errors and warnings before the due date only to find she's gone into premature labor and can't be reached.

Under the old late policy, Ray would then need to check to see if the opportunity used standard or special due dates. If special due dates, they'd be out of luck. If standard due dates, he'd need to determine if there was a one week or two week window of consideration based on the due date. Ray may also need to explain to some PD/PIs why late submission is an option while for others under similar circumstances, but applying to different funding opportunity announcements, it isn't. Poor Ray.

The new policy is much simpler and provides greater consistency across Program announcements (PAs) and Requests For Applications (RFAs). Though permission to submit late is still not provided in advance, under the new late policy NIH will simply consider accepting applications within the two-week window following the application due date if an acceptable reason is provided in a cover letter submitted with the late application. See NOT-OD-15-039 for exceptions (like RFAs stating no late applications will be accepted), steps that must be taken for an application to be considered under the late policy, and examples of reasons why late application will or will not be accepted.

ASSIST Becomes an Option for Most Grant Programs in 2015
In 2013 and 2014, ASSIST, NIH's on-line system for application preparation and submission, was used by folks applying to NIH's complex, multi-project grant programs. In 2015, ASSIST will also become an option for NIH's single-project grant programs.

You may be thinking that if ASSIST can handle our most complex applications then handling our simpler applications should be a snap. Well, it's pretty straight forward, but does take a bit more work than you might think.

When developing ASSIST to prepare and submit applications to Grants.gov, we took the opportunity to also improve how NIH processes the submitted applications we get from Grants.gov. We redesigned how we handle tasks like validating applications and assembling application images. Our new approach on the 'back end' has enabled us to provide some long requested features like pre-application error checking and application previewing in the ASSIST 'front end'. It also means we need to migrate all our activity code specific validation and processing rules to the new system in order for ASSIST to provide its full benefit for single-project applications.

So, throughout the year you'll see announcements indicating ASSIST is available for a specific set of activity codes. By February, expect to see such an announcement for R03 and R21 activity codes. By the end of the year, ASSIST will be an option for all the activity codes already supported by the other submission options – Grants.gov's downloadable forms and system-to-system solutions. For more information about the rollout of ASSIST to single-project grant programs, please read NIH Guide Notice NOT-OD-15-044.

2015 Regional Seminars
We'll be back in "Charm City" (Baltimore, MD) May 6-8 for the 2015 NIH Regional Seminar on Program Funding and Grants Administration (NOT-OD-15-042). If you are new to NIH grant processes and policies, you will be amazed at just how much information we can cram into a few days.

This year we'll be offering additional optional workshops and a revamped curriculum for new investigators. We've also been incorporating your feedback into improvements to our standard conference topics including NIH fundamentals, compliance, peer review, grant writing for success, pre-award and post-award issue, animal and human subject research and how to interact electronically with NIH (that last bits my specialty). I'd love to see you there. If seeing you in May isn't an option, we hope to offer a 2nd seminar in late summer or early fall of 2015 in San Diego, California that you may want to consider.

Registration will open soon. In the meantime, access more information and a listserv option at http://grants.nih.gov/grants/seminars.htm.

When Federal Offices (Sort of) Close

Snow days just aren't what they used to be for many NIHers. Last winter you may have heard "Federal offices in the D.C. metro area are closed" and assumed NIH wasn't open for business. Not necessarily the case. The *small print* that accompanies that statement is 'employees must follow their agency's policies'. For NIH, that means many of us (especially folks in the Office of Extramural Research including help desk staff) are still working (just in our own homes and in comfier clothes).

So, how does this impact you? Well, it means that NIH offices 'closing' doesn't automatically mean a slip in application due dates. Even when offices closed on February 12 last year (the standard due date for Career Development applications), NIH held firm on the due date. You can expect a similar approach this year.

Now if your institution closes due to weather and you aren't open for business, then that's a whole different matter (see [NIH Extramural Response to Natural Disasters and Other Emergencies](#)). You do not need prior permission to submit late. Your submission must include a cover letter indicating the reason for the delay and the delay must not exceed the time period that the applicant organization is closed.

Yesterday the DC Metro area got a few inches of snow which basically crippled our roadways. Seriously, we're *really* bad at the whole driving in snow thing here – there are just too many cars and nowhere to put snow. I'm glad that teleworking is now an option, but I kinda miss the childish joy of seeing everything carpeted in white and thinking *"snow day – I can't wait to get out and play!"… "Snow day – time to fire up the laptop and VPN into work"* just doesn't carry the same impact. Sign of the times.

Thought for the Day
Cheers to a new year and another chance for us all to get it right. – Oprah Winfrey

Take care,

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