NIH eSubmission Items of Interest - June 4, 2014

Don't Forget the eSubmission Basics

I had the privilege of spending some time last week with the eRA Commons Help Desk and posed the question - "If you could tell the applicant community one thing about application submission what would it be?" I was a bit surprised to hear the same key messages that we have been pushing for years. On the other hand, that's why we consider them 'the eSubmission basics'.

So, here's a quick reminder…

- Watch out for form fields required by NIH that are not marked required on federal-wide forms (e.g. Credential for PD/PIs and Organization for all entries on R&R Sr/Key Person Profile form; primary site DUNS on Project/Performance Sites form).
- Use PDF format for all attachments. Follow PDF Guidelines.
- Submit early – days, not minutes – to allow time to correct unforeseen errors.
- Track your submission in eRA Commons. Email can be unreliable.
- Check your entire assembled application image in eRA Commons. If you can't view it, we can't review it!
- If federal system issues threaten your on-time submission you need to notify the help desk and follow the Guidelines for Applicants Experiencing System Issues.

Impact of Biosketch Pilot on Non-pilot Applications

Did you see in the NIH Guide (NOT-OD-14-091) or in Rock Talk (Changes to the Biosketch) that NIH is piloting a new biosketch format? The pilot directly impacts applicants applying to a few Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs) (e.g., RFA-NR-15-001), but there is an immediate indirect impact to all applicants as well. In order to accommodate the pilot applications, eRA has changed the way we systematically validate the biosketch page limit for all applications. Specifically, a warning will fire if you submit a 5 page biosketch and an error will fire if your biosketch is over 5 pages. Applicants to pilot FOAs can ignore the 5-page warning, but everyone else should take action or risk post-submission rejection of their applications. After your application moves forward to NIH staff, we will do a manual check of the biosketches in applications to FOAs not participating in the pilot. If your non-pilot FOA requires 4 pages, but you included 5 and ignored the warning, then your application may not be reviewed.

Applicants must read and follow all FOA and application guide instructions – even those that aren't enforced by electronic systems.

Non-standard Characters in Form Fields

Although NIH systems now support a broader character set including Greek and other non-standard characters, Grants.gov systems currently do not. When completing application form fields type content directly from your keyboard. Avoid cutting and pasting from Word and other

word processors- they often convert your plain text to rich text (e.g. Word converts quotes to 'smart quotes' that curve towards the text between them and combines two dashes into one long em-dash.)

Also, keep your text as simple as possible. The following characters are typically 'safe': letters, numbers, spaces, underscores, periods, dashes (not em-dashes), quotes (not smart quotes), parentheses, brackets, ampersands, tilde, exclamation points, commas, colons, semicolons, at signs, number signs, dollar signs, percent signs, plus signs, equal signs, and asterisks.

Limit your use of fancier characters to the body of your PDF attachments.

Submitting Applications with more than 5 Budget Periods

Although NIH typically allows only 5 budget periods to be submitted with grant applications, from time to time you will come across a FOA that allows more than 5 budget periods. Most NIH FOAs include the R&R Budget form which only accommodates data collection for 5 budget periods leaving applicants wondering what to do with the rest of the data. Applicants have been forced to use a rather clunky 'workaround' that includes adding the additional budget period information in the budget justification.

eRA has just added system support for Grants.gov's R&R Budget 10YR form that will allow for the collection of up to 10 budget periods of data. Going forward, this form will be included with the few, special FOAs that allow more than 5 budget periods. The bulk of NIH FOAs will continue to use the standard R&R Budget form.

Transition to FORMS-C To Complete in August

If it seems like I've been talking about transitioning to FORMS-C for a year – I have. On May 30, 2013, we announced our first transition to updated application forms (FORMS-C) for application due dates on/after September 25, 2013 (NOT-OD-13-074). The Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs are our last remaining programs to use the older forms. These programs are scheduled to transition to FORMS-C for due dates on/after August 5, 2014 (NOT-OD-14-089) marking the end of a rather lengthy transition.

Believe it or not, this summer my friends in policy will start pulling together requirements for the next OMB clearance of the PHS (agency-specific) forms used in our applications (they expire in August 2015). Before you know it we'll be talking about 'FORMS-D' forms. For now, let's celebrate getting through this one. Woo-hoo!

CYA

Cover Your Application - that's what you thought I was talking about – right? NIH form packages no longer use a separate, agency-specific PHS Cover Letter form. The version of the SF424 (R&R) cover form included in FORMS-C packages has a new Cover Letter Attachment (item #21 at the very bottom of the form). If you plan to include a cover letter with your

application – use this Cover Letter Attachment only! The eRA systems know to keep this attachment separate from your assembled application image and to limit access to it. If you attach it someplace else (e.g., Pre-application attachment on the SF424 (R&R) cover form, Other Attachments on the R&R Other Project Information form) it will become part of your assembled application image and will be visible to everyone with access to your application including reviewers.

If you're at the NIH Regional Seminar on Program Funding and Grants Administration in Baltimore this month, please stop by and say hello.

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