



Glossary & Acronyms

Frequently Asked Questions

Applying Electronically

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I. Preparing to Apply

A. Registration Basics

1. What do I need to do before I can submit an application through Grants.gov?

Grants.gov and eRA Commons registrations are required for all applicant institutions prior to application submission. Grants.gov registration provides the ability to submit applications electronically. eRA Commons registration allows NIH to receive applications electronically from Grants.gov and validate them against agency-specific business rules. It also provides a way for NIH and registered users to communicate electronically after submission. Assignment, review outcome and summary statement information is available through the eRA Commons. Principal Investigators (PIs) must also register in the eRA Commons.

2. Does a Principal Investigator have to register in Grants.gov and eRA Commons?

A Principal Investigator does NOT need to register in Grants.gov but MUST be registered in the eRA Commons prior to electronic submission of a grant application. The Principal Investigator (PI) registers in Commons through the organization's Authorized Organizational Representative (also known as the Signing Official).

3. When should applicant organizations begin the registration process?

Applicants are highly encouraged to start the registration process at least four weeks prior to the application due date. Foreign organizations and new businesses [i.e. those applying to the Internal Revenue Service (IRS) for an Employer Identification Number (EIN) to complete the CCR registration] should start the process at least two months (eight weeks) prior to the application due date. NIH will not make any allowances for submission delays due to incomplete Grants.gov registration.

Also see FAQs on [Submission Deadline](#).

B. Registration in Grants.gov

1.

NOTE: As of July 2012, Central Contractor Registry (CCR) has been replaced by [System for Awards Management \(SAM\)](#).

2. What is Grants.gov?

Grants.gov is a cross-agency initiative spanning all 26 Federal grant making agencies. It provides a single source to find Federal government wide competitive grant.

3. What is involved in the Grants.gov registration process?

Applicant Organizations need to complete a one-time only registration process for Grants.gov that includes obtaining a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number, registering in System for Award Management (SAM) and registering in Grants.gov. Detailed steps for Grants.gov registration for both domestic and foreign organizations can be found on the [Grants.gov Registration Instructions for Domestic and Foreign Organizations](#) page. In addition, registration information can be found at the Grants.gov Get Registered webpage: http://www.grants.gov/applicants/get_registered.jsp. Please note that this is a one-time only registration for all Federal agencies using Grants.gov. If your organization has already completed the Grants.gov registration process to submit electronically for another Federal agency, a separate Grant.gov registration is not necessary for NIH submissions.

4. Part of the Grants.gov process is registering in the System of Awards Management (SAM). What is SAM and how will an applicant organization know if they have already registered or have successfully registered in the SAM?

Grants.gov requires that applicant organizations obtain a [DUNS number](#) and register with the System for Award Management (SAM). SAM is a free website which consolidates Federal procurement systems and the Catalog of Federal Domestic Assistance. Currently CCR, FedReg, ORCA and EPLS have been migrated into SAM. Over the coming years, additional system migrations will be completed. Grants.gov uses SAM to establish roles and IDs for those organizations electronically applying for grants.

To register in SAM:

- Go to the SAM home page at <https://www.SAM.gov/>
- Click on 'Create an Account' just under the account Login button to the right top of the Home Page or under 'Register with SAM' in the middle of the Home Page
- Complete and submit the online registration.

5. How often do I need to update my SAM registration?

You must maintain an active entity registration (formerly CCR registration) which needs to be renewed at least annually.

6. Where can I find more information on SAM?

See the [Quick Start for Grants Registrations](#) at www.SAM.gov for additional information.

7. My organization already has a DUNS number. Do we need to establish a different one for Grants.gov submissions?

Your organization will need to determine if the already established DUNS number is being used for grant applications. Keep in mind that since applications to the NIH have required a DUNS number since October 1, 2003 most applicant organizations have already fulfilled this registration step. If your organization has multiple DUNS numbers, be aware that the same DUNS number must be used for your Grants.gov and eRA Commons registrations as well as on the application itself.

8. Grants.gov requires a DUNS and SAM Registration. I'm also a reviewer for NIH so now I'm required to have an individual DUNS & SAM registration as well. Can I use my individual DUNS on applications and my individual SAM registration?

No. When submitting applications through Grants.gov, the DUNS number of the applicant organization and the SAM registration of the Authorized Organizational Official of the applicant organization must be used. The DUNS number used during SAM registration must also match the DUNS number in the organization's profile (Institutional Profile File) in eRA Commons.

9. I seem to be receiving a lot of unnecessary email solicitations and spam after I registered obtained a Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) number for my organization as part of the Grants.gov registration process. How can I prevent this spam?

As a result of obtaining a DUNS number, you might be included on D&B's marketing list that is sold to other companies [Dun and Bradstreet (D&B) is the commercial company that provides the DUNS number]."

If you do not want your name or company name included on this marketing list, D&B has asked that you contact them anytime at 1-866-705-5711 to request removal from that list.

C. Registration in Commons

1. What is involved in the NIH eRA Commons registration process?

Applicant organizations submitting grants to NIH must complete a one-time, two-step registration in the NIH eRA Commons. For detailed steps, visit [Detailed steps for Commons registration](#) (PDF - 105 KB).

- Commons Registration for the Organization: To find out if an organization is already Commons-registered, check this query '[List of Commons Registered Organizations](#)'. For organizations that need to register, go to the '[Grantee Organization Registration](#)' link on the [eRA Commons Homepage](#).
- Commons Registration for the Principal Investigator (PI): The individual designated as the PI on the application must also be registered in the Commons. The PI must hold a PI account and be affiliated with the applicant organization. This registration must be done by an organization official or their delegate who is already registered in the Commons. To register PIs in the Commons, refer to the eRA Commons User Guide found at: <http://era.nih.gov/commons/index.cfm>.
- When a Signing Official, Administrative Officer or Account Administrator creates an account for a PI, the PI is sent an email to that effect telling him or her to go to the Commons to verify their profile information.

2. Who needs to be registered in the eRA Commons?

The applicant organization, Signing Official (SO) and the PD/PI must be registered in the NIH eRA Commons in order to submit an application. Post Docs must also be registered in order to meet annual reporting requirements.

3. Do the PD/PI and SO require separate accounts in Commons (even if the PD/PI and SO are the same person)?

Yes, both the PI and SO need separate accounts in Commons. Only an SO has the ability to 'reject' an application in Commons to address warnings or if the assembled application does not reflect the submitted application package due to eRA Commons or NIH system issues. If an SO is given a PI role, it overrides the SO's privileges such as the ability to reject the application, submit eSNAPs or Just-In-Time information and request No Cost Extensions. Therefore, if you are the SO for your organization as well as a PD/PI of the grant, you will need two separate accounts with different user names — one with SO authority and one with PI authority. When an institution is registered, an SO account is created. Log on to the account with the SO authority role and create another account with PI authority.

4. I have an Internet Assisted Review (IAR) account. Will this satisfy the requirement for an eRA Commons account?

No, the Program Director/Principal Investigator must have a PI role on the eRA Commons account in addition to the Internet Assisted Review (IAR) role. The PD/PI should work with the Signing Official to verify that they have a PI role.

5. Does a PD/PI who moves to another institution have to register again in Commons?

No.. A PI's Commons account follows the PI throughout their career. The new institution will need to affiliate the PD/PI's Commons account with their institution. The steps to affiliate a PD/PI to the applicant organization/institution are:

1. PD/PI gives Commons user ID and email address to the administrator of the applicant institution. (The email address must be the one that is contained in the Personal Profile for the PI.)
2. Administrator logs into the Commons. (The administrator can be the Signing Official, Administrative Official, or the Accounts Administrator.)
3. Administrator selects "Administration" tab and then "Accounts" tab.
4. Administrator selects "Create Affiliation" tab.
5. Administrator enters the Commons User ID and Email address into the appropriate fields and clicks "Submit."

6. For consortium/subawards, do the sub-awardees need to be registered with eRA Commons and Grants.gov?

Sub-awardees are not required to register. However, we do encourage them to be proactive and register to be ready to serve as primary awardees in the future.

D. Hardware And Software Requirements

1. What are the minimum hardware requirements for submitting grants electronically to NIH?

In order to complete and submit grant applications, applicants must download a Grants.gov compatible version of Adobe Reader software. Hardware requirements may vary depending on which compatible version of Adobe reader you choose and your computer's operating system. Visit [Adobe's system requirements](#) [\[EXIT Disclaimer\]](#) page to determine your specific hardware requirements for electronic submission to NIH through Grants.gov.

2. What software do I need to have loaded before I can begin using Grants.gov?

Applicants must download a Grants.gov compatible version of Adobe Reader software. Users can identify and download Grants.gov compatible versions of Adobe Reader by visiting the [Download Software](#) page on the Grants.gov Web site.

NIH requires all text attachments to be submitted as PDF files, so NIH applicants will also need a program to create PDFs. On the Grants.gov [Download Software](#) webpage users will find a variety of [PDF Conversion Tools](#) that can be downloaded and used to create the required PDFs.

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II. Finding a Funding Opportunity

1. With electronic submission, all applications must be submitted in response to a Funding Opportunity Announcement. How does one submit applications, especially R01s, which previously came in unsolicited?

NIH and other HHS Agencies have developed generic Parent Funding Opportunity Announcements for use by applicants who wish to submit what were formerly termed "unsolicited" or "investigator-initiated" applications. See the [Parent Announcements](#) page for a list of current NIH Parent Announcements and further information.

2. Where does NIH post funding opportunities?

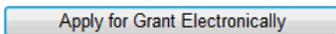
Funding opportunities are posted at Grants.gov and in the [NIH Guide to Grants and Contracts](#).

3. How does the Grants.gov system populate the field for CFDA numbers?

The Grants.gov system allows NIH to leave this field blank. NIH staff will complete this field in the eRA system after submission.

4. Should I look for an opportunity by entering the CFDA number on Grants.gov?

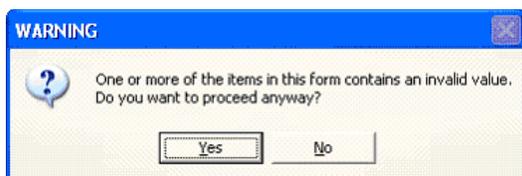
On Grants.gov, applicants should search by Funding Opportunity Announcement number rather than CFDA. Note that NIH has made it easier for applicants by adding a button titled 'Apply for Grant Electronically' (see button below) to the [NIH Guide for Grants & Contracts](#) announcements that allows applicants to access the Grants.gov application package directly from the Guide.



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III. Downloading the Application

1. When I download an application package from the FOA and save it for the first time locally, I get this warning message:



Is there something wrong with the forms?

No, the forms are OK. The message shows because no data has been entered yet. You will actually get this or a similar message every time you save until all data entry is complete. The applicant can ignore this error message until the final save before you submit. If you are ready to submit and are still getting this error message when you save, you should use the "Check Package for Errors" button to determine what may need to be fixed before submitting. If errors are found, a message box will appear telling you the total number of errors found and the details about the first one. Unfortunately there is no way to get a comprehensive list at this time. If you have five errors, you would have to fix the first one, and repeat the "check package for errors" process until all are corrected.

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IV. Application Forms Updates and Choosing the Correct Forms

1. Why do the SF424 (R&R) Application Forms Change?

NIH periodically implements updated versions of the SF424 (R&R) grant application forms in order to remain current with the most recent form sets available through Grants.gov and approved by the Office of Management and Budget (OMB).

2. How will I know if the SF424 Application Forms are changing?

Any upcoming forms changes will be announced by NIH well before use of the new forms is required by applicants, so that applicants have time to prepare for the transition.

Like all major eSubmission news, applicants can expect that forms changes will be announced in the [NIH Guide for Grants & Contracts](#), on the Applying Electronically website, and through various media outlets listed on our [Get Connected](#) page.

3. How can I ensure that I am using the correct forms?

NIH gives each set of updated forms a version name for quick identification and easier communication. For example, our most recent version is referred to as 'FORMS-C'. When NIH posts an opportunity and its application package to Grants.gov we provide some basic information (opportunity title and number, key dates, etc.). We also have the ability to provide a 'Competition ID' to further identify an opportunity. NIH uses the Competition ID to convey the form version name.

The form version name shows up in the Competition ID field found on various screens and within the application package (see ["Do I Have the Right Electronic Forms?"](#) (PDF - 176 KB) document).

Form changes are announced via a notice in the [NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts](#) (e.g., [NOT-OD-13-074](#)). The notice will specify when applicants must use the updated forms (e.g., 'use FORMS-C packages for due dates on/after September 25, 2013').

4. When do I need to use FORMS-C application packages?

Electronic applications to FOAs with due dates on/after September 25, 2013 must use updated forms (FORMS-C), except:

- Career Development, Fellowship, and Training FOAs will transition to updated forms for deadlines on/after January 25, 2014.
- Small Business FOAs will NOT transition to updated forms until Small Business Reauthorization form changes are also available - timing TBD.

See [NOT-OD-13-074](#).

5. Will NIH be reissuing each FOA or simply posting a new application package to incorporate the form updates?

For the activity codes transitioning to updated forms for deadlines on/after September 25, 2013, we will simply expire old application packages and post new ones to most of the existing FOAs (i.e., no new FOA number, but must use the application package with a Competition ID of 'FORMS-C').

However, NIH has decided to take this opportunity to update the parent announcements with the latest program changes and guidance. Therefore, you will see new parent announcements posted with FORMS-C packages for use for due dates on/after September 25. The old parent announcements with ADOBE-FORMS-B2 packages will remain available during the transition for the September 7 AIDS due date and for applications submitted under the continuous submission policy.

Planning is still underway for the Fellowship, Training, Career Development and Small Business programs that will transition later. Since those form changes will be made in conjunction with other programmatic changes, it is likely that we will need to post new FOAs as well as application packages for all FOAs affected by those transitions.

6. When will Application Guides be updated to reflect form updates?

NIH targets having updated application instructions available at least 60 days before the first due date to use the new forms.

The [Application Guide SF424 \(R&R\) - Forms Version C](#) was posted on July 25, 2013.

Applicants should choose the appropriate Application Guide based on their due date, type of grant program (General, SBIR/STTR, Fellowship) and form version (B Series or C Series).

7. If I'm submitting for the September 9, 2013 AIDS due date, which forms should I use?

All applicants should use the B Series application form packages for the September 9, 2013 due date.

Note: The R01 and R21 Parent FOAs were recently reissued.

Activity Code	Old Parent FOA	Reissued Parent FOA
R01	PA-11-260	PA-13-302
R03	PA-11-262	PA-13-303
R21	PA-11-261	PA-13-303

The B Series application packages associated with the old parent FOAs should be used for the AIDS due date. The old parent FOAs indicate that they expire September 8, 2013 (since the September 7 AIDS deadline is the last official due date). However, since September 7 falls on a Saturday, the due date moves to September 9. The FOAs are set-up with a grace period behind the scenes to allow applications to continue to be accepted beyond the expiration date which accomodates the September 9 due date.

8. Which forms should applicants submitting under NIH's Continuous Submission policy use?

Applicants submitting under the [Continuous Submission](#) policy should use B Series application packages if submitting before September 25, 2013 and C Series application packages if submitting on/after September 25, 2013.

Note: The R01 and R21 Parent FOAs were recently reissued.

Activity Code	Old Parent FOA	Reissued Parent FOA
R01	PA-11-260	PA-13-302
R21	PA-11-261	PA-13-303

The old Parent FOAs will indicate that they expire September 8, 2013 (since the September 7 AIDS deadline is the last official due date). However, the FOAs are set-up with a grace period behind the scenes to allow applications to continue to be accepted up to September 24, 2013.

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V. Completing the SF424 (R&R) Application

A. About the SF424 (R&R) Application Form

1. Which form should be used to submit electronic applications to NIH via Grants.gov?

Applicants should use the Standard Form (SF) 424 Research & Related (R&R) family of forms. SF424 consolidates grant applications, related data and forms currently used by Federal grant-making agencies to enable applicants to use familiar forms regardless of the program or agency to which they are applying. The SF424 Research & Related (R&R) will become the government-wide data set for research grant applications. The SF424 (R&R) will replace the Public Health Service (PHS) 398 form at NIH.

2. Are SF424 components portable? Can components be reused for other applications?

Currently there is no way to reuse the forms from one opportunity to another. Grants.gov hopes to have the functionality next year to import and export data for reuse with other applications.

3. Where is the budget justification located?

In the SF424 (R&R) detailed budget component, the budget justification is item K--a PDF upload. In the PHS398 Modular budget component, budget justifications for Personnel, Consortium and Additional Narrative are requested as separate PDF uploads as part of the Cumulative Budget Information.

B. Application Instructions

1. Where will an applicant need to look to find application instructions?

Application instructions are available in two places: the SF424 (R&R) Application Guide and within each Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA). The Application Guide includes all general instructions and a link to the guide is provided in every FOA. The FOA itself contains Program-specific application requirements. Both resources should be carefully read before completing an application. However, applicants should be aware that instructions in the FOA "trump" those found in the application guide.

2. Where is the SF424 (R&R) Application Guide available?

The application guide can be found on OER's [SF424 \(R&R\) Application and Electronic Submission Information](#) page.

C. Resubmission, Revision, and Renewal Applications

1. Is there a comparison of the old vs. new application terminology to help me determine which application type I am submitting?

New Grants.gov Term	Old NIH Term	Notes
New	New	An application that is submitted for funding for the first time. Includes multiple submission attempts within the same round. (Type 1)
Renewal	Competing Continuation	Previous years of funding for the project have elapsed. Competing for additional years of funding to continue original project. (Type 2)
Revision	Competing Supplement	Request for additional funds for a current award to expand the scope of work. Applicants should contact the awarding agency for advice on submitting any revision/supplement application. (Type 3)
Resubmission	Revision or Amended Application	Application previously reviewed. A revised or amended application addresses reviewer feedback. (A1/A2)
Continuation	Progress Report	NIH does not use the SF424 (R&R) for Continuation Applications. (Type 5; Progress Reports for Simplified Non-competing (SNAP) are submitted directly to eRA Commons for others paper is still submitted)

2. What do I do if more than one application type seems to fit my situation?

Only one option can be selected. An easy rule of thumb is that any application that is submitted in response to review feedback should be marked as a resubmission. So, if an applicant is submitting a resubmission of a renewal or a resubmission of a revision, then resubmission should be chosen as the single application type.

3. What do I put in the Federal Identifier field of the SF424 (R&R) cover component?

If "Type of Application" is "New", you can leave the Federal Identifier field blank on the first submission attempt. However, the Federal Identifier field becomes a required field when submitting a Changed/Corrected application to address errors/warnings. When submitting a Changed/Corrected "New" application, enter the Grants.gov tracking number of the previous submission attempt (e.g. GRANT00123456). If you are unable to find the tracking number, enter "N/A".

If "Type of Application" is "Renewal", "Revision" or "Resubmission", enter the IC and serial number of the prior application/award number (e.g. CA654321). For these types of applications, do not change the Federal Identifier field when submitting Changed/Corrected applications.

4. When submitting an application again to address errors or warnings, how do I indicate on the form that the current submission supersedes the previous?

On the SF424 (R&R) cover component, box #1 Type of Submission should be set to "Application" on the initial application submission. Box #1 should be set to "Changed/Corrected" for all subsequent submissions of the same application to address errors or warnings.

Note that box #8 Type of Application remains the same from one submission attempt to the next within the same receipt deadline.

See the section of the application guide titled "Correcting Errors" for additional information.

5. What part of the application/award number is the IC and serial number?

NIH's grant application/award numbers consist of the following parts: <>

- A single-digit Application Type
- A three-digit Activity Code
- A two-letter IC Code
- A six-digit Serial Number
- A two-digit Grant Year (preceded by a dash to separate it from the serial number)
- Additional suffix information that may include the letter "S" and related number for a particular supplement record, the letter "A" and related number to identify an amendment and/or the letter "X" and related number to identify a fellowship's institutional allowance record.

For example, 3R01CA654321-04S1A1 would indicate an amendment (A1) to a supplemental (Type 3) application for a traditional research project (R01) referred to the National Cancer Institute (CA). The number further identifies the application serially as the 654321 new proposal submitted to the NCI, and indicates that this is the first supplemental application (S1) to the fourth year (-04) of the support to this project. In this example, the IC and serial number would be "CA654321".

Additional information on the NIH grant application/award identification numbering system can be found at: <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/ac.pdf> (PDF - 622 KB).

D. Budgets and Subawards

1. Is a DUNS number required for every subaward/consortium organization?

Ideally yes. The 'Organization DUNS' is a required field on the 'Research & Related Budget' form, regardless of the budget "type"- project or subaward/consortium. However, at the subaward level, neither Grants.gov nor NIH currently validates on the accuracy of that field. For subaward organizations, eRA Commons only validates that the DUNS field contains a value and that the value is not the same DUNS number provided by the prime applicant. At this time the eRA Commons does not do any further validations on the accuracy of the number. So for now, if a subaward/consortium organization is unable to secure a DUNS number in time, then a value of nine zeros can be entered in the DUNS field on the subaward/consortium budget component. This requirement may change over time.

Remember that the prime applicant uses the R&R Subaward Budget Attachment form to generate a copy of the Research & Related Budget form that can be sent to the subaward/consortium organization, filled out, sent back to the prime and attached to the R&R Subaward Budget Attachment form.

2. Is SAM & Grants.gov registration required for subaward/consortium institutions?

Subaward/consortium organizations need not register with SAM or Grants.gov, unless they plan to submit some day as an applicant organization. This requirement may change over time.

3. Is a Commons registration required for every subaward/consortium organization?

Subaward/consortium organizations need not register in the eRA Commons, unless they plan to submit some day as an applicant organization. This requirement may change over time.

4. For the Indirect Cost Rate (%) field in the budget form, I can only enter up to 2 numbers. Our rate is 110%. How can I enter 110%?

Grants.gov is working on a solution. Until one is implemented, the recommended workaround is to split the Indirect Cost Rate into 2 lines on the budget form.

5. Where should I enter the subawardee's indirect costs in the main project budget?

When a grant involves a subcontract, the total costs (Direct + Facilities & Administrative Costs) of all subcontracts are considered Direct Costs for the prime applicant. Therefore, for the parent budget, line F.5 (Subawards/Consortium/Contractual Costs) must reflect the total costs for all subcontracts. NIH continues to have a policy that excludes the consortium F&A costs from any direct cost limit. Our systems will do this calculation for us.

6. An applicant may see both detailed and modular budget component options as part of the SF424 (R&R) application package. Which should be used?

Applicants should refer to the instructions in their specific Funding Opportunity Announcement FOA and should carefully read the application guide for detailed instructions. As a general rule, if an application meets the modular limit of \$250K or under, the applicant must submit a modular budget. Likewise, if an application exceeds \$250K, it must come in as a detailed budget. The applicant should complete the budget component appropriate to their situation.

7. The R&R cumulative budget page is 'automatically' filled-in by the system – correct?

The cumulative budget is system-generated and PIs will see it as part of the R&R detailed budget component or a modular component. They do not have to do any data entry.

8. On the page for the Research & Related Budget, Sections F-K, Budget Period 1, there is a box in the upper right hand corner that states 'Next Period.' However, it is grayed out and we cannot access the next period forms. How does one navigate to the screens for the next budget period?

You must complete all the required information (i.e., those fields that are highlighted and noted with an "*") on this page before the "Next Period" button is activated.

E. PDF Attachments, Cover Letters and Other Additional Materials

1. There are a number of places where an attachment is uploaded. What type of attachments does NIH accept?

NIH only accepts PDF attachments. Users will find a variety of information on tools and software that can be used to generate PDF attachments on Grants.gov's Software webpage (http://www.grants.gov/help/download_software.jsp#pdf_conversion_programs) under the header 'Convert Documents to PDF' (http://www.grants.gov/help/download_software.jsp#pdf_conversion_programs).

2. All attachments must be in PDF form. Who is responsible for generating the PDF documents.

Responsibility for generating PDF attachments falls on the applicant.

3. How do I make sure that my PDF transmits successfully and avoid potential PDF problems?

To avoid PDF problems follow these [guidelines](#) closely.

4. How is appendix material accommodated?

There is an attachment upload available for Appendix material. Up to 10 separate PDF attachments can be included. The appendix attachment upload feature is in the PHS 398 Research Plan Component.

5. How is supplemental/additional/correction material submitted after application submission accommodated?

The current practice has not been altered. Supplemental/additional/correction material may only be submitted through and at the discretion of the assigned Scientific Review Officer(SRO), and the submission is made directly to the SRO. Please note that some FOAs prohibit the submission of supplemental/additional/correction materials. Refer to your specific FOA for additional guidance.

6. How does an applicant submit appendix material that cannot be transmitted electronically?

"Hard" appendix materials like a video or heart valve have to be physically sent to the Scientific Review Officer and then to the reviewers.

7. How will administrative supplements be handled?

The current practice for administrative supplements will not be changed at this time. They will continue to be handled by the individual Institutes and Centers (ICs).

8. Do applicants have the opportunity to include a cover letter?

Yes. One of the PHS398 optional components is the Cover Letter. If multiple application submissions are necessary to correct errors, only the last cover letter submitted will be retained in the system.

F. File Size, Page Limits and Special Characters

1. Is there a limit on application files size?

Grants.gov recommends limiting the total size of application packages (including attachments) to 200 MB.

If you have difficulty submitting your application and believe application size may be an issue, please open a ticket with the eRA Helpdesk at <http://itservicedesk.nih.gov/era/>. Helpdesk staff will escalate the issue to appropriate technical resources and can work with you to get your application submitted.

2. Does eRA electronically enforce page limits?

Most page limits are enforced by the eRA system. For example, the system will check the combined page limit for the Specific Aims, Background and Significance, Preliminary Studies/Progress Reports and Research Design Methods sections but will not enforce the recommendations provided in the Application Guide for each of these subsection. Note that while these computer validations will help minimize incomplete and/or non-compliant applications, they do not replace the validations conducted by NIH staff. Applications found not to comply with the requirements may be delayed in the review process.

3. How Do I Track Page Limitations When I Have to Submit All of the Various Sections of the Research Plan as Separate PDF Files?

Separate attachments have been designed for the Research Plan sections to maximize automatic validations conducted by the eRA system. When the application is received by the agency, all of the Research Plan sections will be concatenated in the appropriate order so that reviewers and agency staff will see a single cohesive Research Plan.

While each section of the Research Plan needs to eventually be uploaded separately, applicants are encouraged to construct the Research Plan as a single document, separating sections into distinct PDF attachments just before uploading the files. In this way the applicant can better monitor formatting requirements such as page limits.

4. Is there a character limit on organization names in the R&R Budget form and the R&R Senior/Key Person Profile (Expanded) forms?

Yes. You can only use 60 or less characters in the following fields:

- 'Enter name of Organization' field on the Research & Related Budget - Section A & B form
- 'Organization Name' field on the Research & Related Senior/Key Person (Expanded) form

G. Application checks (Validations)

1. What are validations?

Validations are system checks against specific business rules that may result in an application receiving errors or warnings. Currently, applications go through two rounds of validations. The application is first checked for Federal-wide requirements by Grants.gov immediately upon its submission. Once the application is forwarded to NIH, it is checked against NIH-specific business rules.

2. Could you provide details of what will be the validations that an application will be checked for - such as page limits?

The list of errors and warnings that an applicant may encounter during the validation process, along with tips to help you understand these better, are available on our [Validations](#) page.

H. Congressional District

1. The SF424 (R&R) cover component requires you to enter your Congressional District as well as the Congressional District of your project's primary site. How do I locate my Congressional District?

One way to locate your Congressional District is to go to the U.S. House of Representatives website at <http://www.house.gov/writerep/>, select your state and enter your zip code. Then click the "Contact My Representative" button. The screen that pops up will list your representative as well as your congressional district.

I. Person Months

1. How should we list partial person months?

Please refer to the [OER FAQs](#) on the subject of listing partial months.

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VI. Submitting Your Application

A. Submission Deadline

1. What is the submission deadline?

Error free applications must be successfully submitted to Grants.gov on the application submission/receipt date listed in the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA). Per standard NIH policy, if the submission/receipt date falls on a weekend or Federal holiday, the submission deadline is automatically extended to the next business day.

2. What is the earliest date I can submit an application?

When NIH issues a new funding opportunity announcement (FOA), the open date (the first date an application may be submitted) is generally set for one month in advance of the application due date. Many FOAs are open for up to three years, with multiple due dates each year, but we recommend you submit within the month prior to the due date you are targeting. If you need to submit earlier, please include a cover letter so we know the application is not late for the previous due date.

NOTE: Reviewers and others eligible for [continuous submission](#) may submit at any time but MUST include a cover letter identifying their eligibility.

3. What is on-time submission?

For an application to be on-time, an error free application must be accepted by Grants.gov with a timestamp on or before 5:00 p.m. local time of the submitting organization on submission deadline date. All registrations must be completed prior to initial submission in order for an application to be considered on-time.

4. What is the application viewing window?

Once an error-free application is submitted through Grants.gov to eRA, the eRA system assembles an application image and posts it in the PD/PI's eRA Commons account. The PD/PI, any delegated Assistants and the Signing Official (SO) have a two (2) business day "application viewing window" during which they can view the assembled application in the Commons – just as a reviewer would see it. The application viewing window is linked to the time of submission (i.e., the window begins the day after the assembled application image is posted in the Commons).

Within the viewing window, the SO can "reject" the application, stopping the application from moving forward to the final steps of the submission process. Rejections cannot be reversed, so this action should be taken cautiously. Once an application has been rejected, applicants can submit a changed/corrected application to Grants.gov. However, if the final submission is not made by the submission deadline, the application will not be considered on time and will be subject to the NIH [policy for late applications](#).

Once the application viewing window has passed, the application automatically moves forward for further consideration and the submission process is complete. Any subsequent changes to the application must be made through and are at the discretion of the assigned Scientific Review Officer (if not prohibited in the Funding Opportunity Announcement).

5. What is NIH's policy for late applications?

The NIH late policy is explained in the following NIH Guide Notices:

- NIH Policy on Late Submission of Grant Applications (Jan. 14, 2011)

6. Can I still submit my application to Grants.gov if the opportunity has expired?

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 late submissions allowed under NIH's late policy (when applicable), and submissions made under NIH's Continuous Submission policy. The grace period also provides NIH with the flexibility to institute contingency plans if needed. The grace period allows for the submission of applications to Grants.gov; however, applications will be accepted at the discretion of NIH.

B. System problems

1. What contingency plans are in place in case the Grants.gov and/or eRA Commons systems have technical problems on a submission/receipt date? If an application has to be submitted again because of system problems, will it be considered "late"?

Most system issues are technical problems with federal systems used for electronic submission of grant applications (Grants.gov or eRA Commons) that keep an application from successfully submitting online. If you think that you are experiencing a systems issue that could threaten your ability to submit on-time, please be sure to follow the guidelines available on the "[Need Assistance with Your Application Submission?](#)" page.

BE ADVISED - Problems with computer systems at the applicant organization, failure to follow instructions in the Application Guide or Funding Opportunity Announcement, or failure to complete required registrations by the submission deadline are not considered system issues. NIH is under no obligation to accept applications that are late for these reasons.

If Grants.gov or eRA Commons is unavailable for a significant period of time leading up to a deadline, then NIH may extend the deadline or allow additional time for applicants to check submission status, address errors and view their applications. The [NIH](#)

[Guide](#), [Electronic Submission Program email lists](#) and [Electronic Submission Web site](#) will be the primary vehicles used to communicate any deadline extensions.

2. I experienced a problem with the submission of my application and contacted the Help Desk, but have not yet received a response and the submission deadline has now passed. What should I do?

The eRA Help Desk makes every effort to respond to all inquiries in a timely manner. However, applicants should remember that Help Desk demand is greatest on and around large submission deadlines and occasionally response times may slow down as a result of the increased call volume during those busy times. As always, we encourage applicants to submit their applications early to allow extra time to work through any unforeseen issues. Additionally, applicants are reminded that the answers to their questions can often be found in their Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) or in the [SF424 Application Guide](#), and are encouraged to check these resources before contacting the Help Desk or while waiting for a response.

Lack of Help Desk response does not excuse applicants from on-time submission requirements if the applicant's question is addressed in the application guide or FOA. Federal system issues that are beyond an applicant's control will be evaluated and considered on a case-by-case basis. Please remember that all system issues must be reported to the eRA Help Desk on or before the submission deadline and only the eRA Help Desk can determine if an encountered problem qualifies as a system issue.

C. Letters of Reference

1. Can I submit a reference letter (or a reference form for individual fellowships programs) for any type of grant application?

A reference letter (or reference form for individual fellowship programs) are only permitted when specifically requested in the funding opportunity announcement or SF 424 (R&R) [application guide](#) instructions.

2. Is there any difference between a reference letter and a reference form?

Both are tools used to assess the qualities and potential of the individual for which support is being requested. However, the information needed and the vehicle used to convey the information does differ depending on the particular program.

For Individual Fellowship Programs, this evaluation **must** be documented using the specific [Reference Form](#). Note that this is the only document that should be used by referees for Individual Fellowships; attempting to also provide a separate letter (such as one written on university letterhead) could delete the required Fellowship Reference Form and cause the application to be considered incomplete.

For Career (K) and other programs that require reference letters, the assessment is provided in a letter format, often prepared on a University letterhead. The submission of a specific form is not required.

See Question #3 below for details on submitting these assessments.

3. How does a referee submit a reference letter (or reference form for individual fellowship programs) for an applicant?

See the demo on [Submitting Reference Letters through eRA Commons](#).

Referees must submit a reference letter (or reference form for individual fellowship programs) (but not both at the same time) directly to [eRA Commons](#), using the Submit Reference Letter [link](#) on the home page. Letters (or reference forms for individual fellowship programs) must be submitted by the same deadline as the grant application and can be submitted before the application itself, as early as the opening date of the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA).

The referee does not need to be registered in Commons to submit a reference letter (or reference form for individual fellowship programs). The referee will enter the following information online at the time of submission:

Referee Information:

- Referee First Name (Required)
- Referee Last Name (Required)
- Referee MI Name (Not Required)
- Referee Email (Required)
- Referee Institution/Affiliation (Required)
- Referee Department (Required)

Applicant Information:

- PI Commons User ID (Required)
- PI Last Name, as it appears on the PI's Commons account (Required) (will be validated to ensure they match)
- Funding Opportunity Announcement Number (Required, and this must be the same as the FOA used for the application submission)
- Reference letter/form Confirmation # (Required only if re-submitting a letter or form; not required otherwise)
- Reference letter (For Career and other select programs) – two pages maximum; PDF format
- Reference form (for individual fellowships only; see [FAQ #2](#)) – two pages maximum; PDF format

After the referee submits the reference letter (or reference form for individual fellowship programs), both the referee and the applicant will receive a confirmation of receipt by email. The confirmation email sent to the applicant will include the name of the referee and the name and the date the letter or form was submitted. **However, the letters and forms are confidential and the applicant will not be able to access the letters or forms themselves.** The email confirmation will include a Reference Letter or form Submission Confirmation Number. The confirmation number will be required when correcting previously submitted letters or forms. Please print the confirmation email for your records.

Please check the SF 424 (R&R) [application guide](#) (Part I, Section 7.3) for complete instructions.

4. Does a referee need to register in eRA Commons to submit a reference letter (or reference form for individual fellowship programs) for the applicant?

No. The referee does not need to register in Commons to submit a reference letter or reference form. However, the referee does need to know the Commons User ID of the applicant.

5. Can reference letters (or reference forms for individual fellowship programs) be submitted prior to the submission of the application and if so, how long before?

Yes. Reference letters or reference forms can be submitted as soon as the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) opens.

6. How are the letters (or reference forms for individual fellowship programs) linked to an application, and what happens to letters or forms that are not linked to applications?

Reference letters or reference forms are linked to an application using the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) number and the Commons User ID of the applicant, as supplied by the referee. It is very important that the referee provide accurate information; if this information is not provided or is provided incorrectly, the reference letter or reference forms will never be linked to the application. Letters or forms that are not linked to an application will be deleted from eRA Commons after six months.

Note: If the applicant must submit Changed/Corrected application(s) to address eRA identified errors/warnings, the reference letters or reference forms will automatically transfer to the most recent application submission for a specific opportunity deadline.

7. Can reference letters (or reference forms for individual fellowship programs) be sent on paper or via email directly to NIH?

No. Reference letters or reference forms for SF 424 (R&R) grant applications (that come in electronically) must be uploaded electronically via [eRA Commons](#).

8. What is the deadline for reference letters (or reference forms for individual fellowship programs) to be submitted?

Reference letters or reference forms, including corrected or revised letters or forms, must be submitted by the application submission deadline. Reference letters or reference forms can be submitted as of the FOA open date, regardless of when the application is submitted.

9. Do reference letters (or reference forms for individual fellowship programs) require a specific format or length?

Fellowship applicants should inform their referees that reference forms are required to be submitted using the form found at [References for Fellowship Awards format](#) (MS Word - 50 KB). This applies to all individual fellowships (F30, F31, F32, and F33). Reference forms must be no longer than two pages in length and must be converted to PDF format before being submitted via the eRA Commons. Guidance is provided in Section 5.4 of the SF 424 (R&R) Fellowship Application Guide.

Reference letters for mentored career development grant programs (K01, K07, K08, K18, K22, K23, K25, and K99) do not require a specific format. Guidance is provided in Section 7.3 of the SF 424 (R&R) [application guide](#).

10. How does the applicant track the reference letters (or reference forms for individual fellowship programs) submitted by his or her referees in eRA Commons?

The applicant may track the status of reference letters or reference forms submitted by his or her referees by logging into his or her Commons account, clicking the Personal Profile tab and clicking on the Reference Letters tab on the second header row. On the *List of Reference Letters* screen, the applicant will see the referee's name, grant number, Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) number, project title, organization/affiliation, department, the referee's e-mail address, and the date the reference letter or reference form was submitted. While the applicant is able to track the status of the letters or forms, he or she will not be able to see the letters or forms themselves due to the confidentiality of their contents.

The applicant also can track the status of reference letters or reference forms matched to a specific application by clicking on the application ID number (once a number has been assigned) from the *List of Applications/Grants* screen in Commons Status. On the *Status Information* page, reference letter or reference form information is available for the PD/PI, PD/PI's assistant(s) (ASSTs) and SO to view, including: referee's name, organization/affiliation, department, the referee's e-mail address, and the date the reference letter or reference form was submitted.

The applicant is responsible for tracking his or her reference letters or reference forms in the eRA Commons and contacting referees to ensure that the letters or forms are submitted and matched to the application by the application due date.

11. Can reference letters (or reference forms for individual fellowship programs) be transferred between FOAs (i.e., if the referee submits a reference letter or form using the incorrect FOA information, or if the applicant decides to change the opportunity to which he or she is applying)?

Referees and/or applicants who need reference letters or reference forms to be transferred must contact the [eRA Commons Help Desk](#) before the application due date.

12. If the applicant's original application was not funded and they submit a Resubmission application, can the reference letter (or reference form for individual fellowship programs) submitted with the original application be used?

No. New reference letters or reference forms must be submitted for each opportunity deadline.

Note: Attempts to use the Reference Letter or Reference form Confirmation Number associated with reference letters or reference forms submitted to previous deadlines will result in an error.

13. How does a referee make a correction to a submitted letter (or reference form for individual fellowship programs)?

To correct/update a letter or form (i.e., replace original letter or form submitted), the referee needs to know the Reference Letter or Reference Form Confirmation Number.

On the [Submit Reference Letter](#) screen in Commons, the referee should enter all the required fields, as well as the confirmation number, and click on 'Continue.' A second screen where he/she can upload the revised letter or form will appear. Once the revised letter or form is uploaded, it overrides the previously submitted letter or form.

Note: It is extremely important that the referee use the confirmation number in submitting the revised reference letter or reference form. Applicants are allowed only a specific number of reference letters or reference forms, and if the referee submits a second letter or form without entering the confirmation number, both letters or forms will be counted toward the number of letters or forms allowed with the application, but two letters or forms submitted by the same referee will not both count toward the required three letters or forms.

14. What is the deadline for correcting/revising a letter (or reference form for individual fellowship programs)?

Corrected/revised reference letters or reference forms must be submitted by the application submission deadline.

15. Why is the applicant being informed that a reference letter (or reference form for individual fellowship programs) has not been submitted, when the applicant has been notified via email that the referees' letters or forms have been received?

Signing Officials and Principal Investigators (PIs) should first check the detailed *Status Information* screen for the application in eRA Commons to ensure the reference letters or reference forms were properly submitted and linked to the application. If the reference letters or reference forms are not listed, the PI can check the Reference Letter section of their Profile to see if the reference letter(s) or form(s) was received and the correct Funding Opportunity Number (FOA) was used in their submission. The issue may be that the referees were given an expired FOA number (e.g., the old FOA number for a K grant application that originally required submissions on paper, but has since been replaced with a new FOA number now that Ks have transitioned to electronic submission).

16. May a mentor or co-mentor submit a reference letter?

No, the mentor and any co-mentors provide their input via the application. If a mentor or co-mentor submits a reference letter, this will NOT be counted toward the three required reference letters. Since an application is allowed only a specific number of reference letters, reference letters written by mentors and/or co-mentors may block the submission of the required reference letters by other individuals.

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VII. Submission Status

A. Email Notifications

1. What kind of email notifications are sent to applicants by Grants.gov and eRA Commons during the submission process?

A detailed listing of the email notifications sent by both Grants.gov and eRA Commons can be found at [Chart of Email Notifications](#).

2. I am an AOR/SO and I have received my email notification from Grants.gov but have not received any notifications from eRA Commons indicating the application has been processed. What do I do?

Since email can be unreliable, it is the applicant's responsibility to periodically check the eRA Commons for the status of these applications. If you do not receive any notifications from eRA Commons and do not see the application status in eRA Commons after two days, contact the eRA Commons Helpdesk.

B. Checking Your Submission Status

1. How can a PI or a Signing Official track their application?

Authorized Organizational Representatives can [track their applications through Grants.gov](#). The AOR also gets an email confirmation both when Grants.gov receives the application and when it passes to NIH. After the application is processed by eRA Commons, the PI or SO can log in to the [eRA Commons](#) and view the status of their application. eRA Commons sends email notifications to both the AOR/SO and PI at different stages of processing. Note: It is the applicants' responsibility to track their application through Grants.gov and NIH eRA Commons.

2. I submitted my application to Grants.gov but cannot see any status regarding the application within the eRA Commons.

If you cannot see the status of your application, it may be due to one of these two reasons:

- The application did not contain a valid Principal Investigator (PI) eRA Commons user ID. This field is not marked as required on the government-wide form, but it is required by NIH.

Action: Check the 'Credential, e.g., agency login:' field in the 'Profile - Project Director/Principal Investigator' section of the Senior/Key Person Profile(s) component of your application to ensure a valid PD/PI eRA Commons user ID was included and entered in all capital letters. It is important to include the PD/PI user ID and not the Signing Official (SO) user ID in this field. You will need to submit the corrected application through Grants.gov in order to view application status in the eRA Commons.

Be sure to check the Changed/Corrected application box in the Type of Submission field of the SF 424 (R&R) cover component. Once that box is checked you will notice that Grants.gov will require data in the Federal Identifier field. If you are submitting a new project application (including corrected submissions for new applications) simply enter "N/A" in this field. For a continuation, revision, or renewal application, enter the assigned Federal Identifier number or award number (e.g., 1 R01 CA 123456-01).

- NIH has not yet processed the application.

Action: If the AOR has not yet received an email notification from Grants.gov that the grantor agency has retrieved the application, the AOR should work with Grants.gov to check on application status. Applicants can track the status of the application at Grants.gov through the Grants.gov "[Track My Application](#)" page. Otherwise, continue to periodically check the eRA Commons for application status.

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VIII. Viewing Your Assembled Application

1. Can I see my complete application as it will be seen by reviewers?

Yes. After NIH receives an error-free application package, it assembles the final application the way a reviewer would see it. The PI and SO have two full weekdays (Monday - Friday, excluded Federal holidays) to view the application after which the submission process is complete and the application moves forward to NIH Receipt and Referral.

2. Are holidays included in the two weekday application viewing window?

Federal holidays are excluded in the two weekday period. For example, if July 4 (Independence Day) falls during the two weekday period, it is not counted towards the two weekdays.

3. Will the AOR/SO and PD/PI be notified to check the assembled application?

Yes, both the AOR/SO and the PD/PI will be sent an email notification to check the application for completeness. However, applicants are reminded that email can be unreliable and it is their responsibility to check their submission status in the eRA Commons.

4. What can I do if I find a problem after the application moves forward for processing?

You should contact the Scientific Review Officer assigned to your application for advice and guidance. Once the application moves to the Division of Receipt and Referral, the helpdesk staff can no longer assist with changes to the application.

5. The bookmarks in my assembled application in eRA Commons do not work as expected; I am sometimes sent to the incorrect page. What should I do?

This is an issue that some users have run into, especially if using Adobe Acrobat Professional. The control icons at the bottom of the Adobe display allow you to set the viewing mode to Single Page, Continuous, Continuous Facing or Facing. The default, Single Page, is the viewing mode that has given users trouble. You can click on the icons to change the viewing mode setting. Applicants are advised to set the page layout option to Continuous mode to ensure that the bookmarks function properly (just to the right of Single page mode; the Continuous mode icon shows one page on top of the other).

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IX. Rejecting an Application

1. Who can "Reject" an application?

Only the AOR/SO has the ability to "reject" an application.

Can I "Reject" the application if the two day application viewing window falls after the submission deadline?

Remember that any application submitted after the deadline will be subject to the [NIH Policy on Late Submission of Grant Applications](#).

The AOR/SO can "reject" the application within the two weekdays viewing window if the assembled application in eRA Commons does not correctly reflect the submitted application package due to system issues with eRA Commons or Grants.gov (i.e. some part of the application was lost during the submission process or did not transfer correctly). Learn about what to do if you believe that you have experienced a system issue on our [Need Help?](#) page.

2. What happens if I accidentally Reject the wrong application?

Once an application is Rejected, the action cannot be reversed. If prior to the deadline, the application that was Rejected by mistake can be submitted again as a Changed/Corrected application. NIH does not consider having an application Rejected by mistake sufficient cause for a late submission.

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X. Submitting Changed/Corrected Applications

1. How are changes or corrections to applications submitted?

It is sometimes necessary to submit changes or corrections to an application submission. For example, if any errors are identified in a submission they must be corrected and the entire application submitted again on or before the submission deadline in order to complete the process.

Steps to submit a corrected application are available at: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/ElectronicReceipt/steps_errors_warnings.htm

2. Is a cover letter required with Changed/Corrected applications?

Changed/Corrected applications submitted before the submission date do not require a cover letter. Any application submitted after the submission date must include a cover letter. The cover letter is not saved from one application submission attempt to the next, so the cover letter submitted with the final assembled application should include ALL the information that you want to convey to NIH. For electronic submissions, the cover letter is an attachment (in PDF format) to the PHS 398 Cover Letter File component found in the Optional Documents section of the application package.

3. If the original application came in on the PHS398, how does a resubmission come in?

Once a grant program/mechanism transitions to electronic submission, all new, renewal, resubmission or revision applications must use the electronic SF 424 (R&R) application (even if the original application was submitted in paper PHS 398 format).

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XI. Submitting multi-project applications using ASSIST

A. About ASSIST

1. What is ASSIST?

NIH is piloting the ability to accept multi-project (also known as multi-component or complex) applications electronically through Grants.gov using the SF424 R&R form set. The Grants.gov downloadable forms currently used for most NIH opportunities cannot support our multi-project requirements. Consequently, we have developed a web-based front-end called ASSIST (Application Submission System & Interface for Submission Tracking) for the preparation and submission of multi-project applications.

ASSIST allows applicants to:

- Use current eRA Commons credentials to access ASSIST
- Delegate application preparation responsibilities to multiple users within and outside the applicant organization while maintaining appropriate access control and security
- Populate data from established eRA Commons profiles
- Run validations on federal-wide and agency business rules prior to submission
- Take advantage of automatic generation of the table of contents, headers, footers, page numbers, etc.
- Print/preview applications in the format used by the agency prior to submission
- Present to reviewers clear, color PDF images, rather than scanned versions of the application
- Avoid the hassle of preparing and shipping multiple paper copies

2. When can I start using ASSIST?

NIH is currently piloting the use of ASSIST with a few Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs). The text of announcements that are part of the pilot will clearly state that electronic application submission is required and that applicants can use ASSIST for application preparation and submission.

See [NIH Announces Plans to Transition to Electronic Submission of Multi-Project Applications \(NOT-OD-12-161\)](#) for additional details.

3. Can my organization continue to use our own system-to-system solution to submit multi-project applications or do we need to use ASSIST?

Please check with the folks responsible for supporting your solution. Grants.gov and NIH can support both single-project and multi-project applications submitted to Grants.gov via system-to-system solutions. However, we expect it will take some time for system-to-system solution providers to adjust their systems to accommodate the changes needed to support multi-project applications.

4. Why can I use ASSIST only for multi-project applications?

ASSIST was developed to allow NIH to transition its remaining grant programs that submit using paper forms and the PHS 398 data set to electronic submission using the SF424 (R&R) data set.

We already accept single-project applications electronically through Grants.gov using Adobe forms, but multi-project applications could not be supported using that submission model. Although ASSIST is only for multi-project applications now, with appropriate resources it could be expanded. Right now, we are focused on finally completing our transition to electronic submission of all competing grant applications.

5. What is the relationship of ASSIST with Grants.gov?

To meet NIH's long standing goal of receiving all grant applications electronically, NIH and the Grants.gov program management staff worked together to develop ASSIST to accommodate electronic submission of NIH's multi-project applications. Grants.gov made significant changes to their system to accommodate the posting of multi-project Funding Opportunity Announcements (FOAs) and the processing of applications submitted for those FOAs.

Although NIH developed ASSIST to meet the needs of our applicants, its implementation is flexible enough to allow for expansion to accommodate other agency programs. The Grants.gov Program Management team has expressed interest in leveraging this collaborative effort to develop an online forms capability for the entire federal grants community. NIH looks forward to working with them on this future endeavor.

B. System Requirements & Technical Limitations

1. What are the browser requirements for using ASSIST?

ASSIST supports the same browsers as eRA Commons, published at: http://era.nih.gov/browser_support_ext.cfm.

2. Are there any file size limits with ASSIST?

We expect most applications will be 100 Mb or less, but the system can handle applications up to 1.2 Gb.

Individual attachments within an application can be up to 35 Mb.

3. Does ASSIST have an inactivity timer?

Save often! ASSIST will log you out after 45 minutes of inactivity. The following activities reset the timer:

- Saving data on a form
- Adding an attachment
- Adding an additional block of data on a form (e.g. Sr/Key person, performance site)
- Validate application
- Preview application

Note that typing information into the fields of a form without taking an action to Save or Add will not reset the timer.

C. Getting Ready to Use ASSIST

1. What registrations are required to use ASSIST?

ASSIST uses the same user authorization service as eRA Commons. All ASSIST users must use their existing eRA Commons IDs or work through their organization to obtain them. In order to submit an application, the submitter must have active Authorized Organization (AOR) credentials in Grants.gov and be a Signing Official (SO) in eRA Commons.

Commons IDs with any of the following roles can be used to initiate and prepare applications using ASSIST:

- Signing Official (SO)
- Administrative Official (AO)
- Principal Investigator (PI)
- Assistant Role (ASST)
- Account Administrator (AA)

A Commons ID with the SO role and active Grants.gov Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) credentials are needed to submit an application.

2. How is access to ASSIST established?

ASSIST leverages account credentials from eRA Commons and Grants.gov.

Work within eRA Commons and Grants.gov to establish your accounts and be sure you log in to those systems before using your accounts with ASSIST.

If you have password or other account issues, return to eRA Commons or Grants.gov to work through those issues.

3. How do I register my organization in eRA Commons?

See http://grants.nih.gov/grants/ElectronicReceipt/com_index.htm.

4. How do I register my organization in Grants.gov?

See http://grants.gov/applicants/get_registered.jsp.

5. Are registrations required for collaborating or contributing organizations that lead components?

The Grants.gov federal-wide forms do require that each organization have a valid DUNS number.

Although not required, NIH recommends that all organizations named on a multi-project application be registered in Commons. Commons registration facilitates autopopulation and other system features. In addition, a valid eRA Commons ID for the Project Lead of a component must be included. If the component organization is not registered in Commons, then the applicant organization can create a Commons ID for the Project Lead.

D. Developing Your Application in ASSIST

1. How are complex applications structured in ASSIST?

NIH has worked with applicants and staff to define a common application format for multi-project applications that allows for some customization to accommodate the needs of our various programs. All electronic multi-project applications will include:

- **A single Overall Component:** The Overall component will have data collection comparable to a single-project application that describes the entire application and how each of the components fit together.
- **Additional Components:** Some number of additional component types (e.g., Admin Core, Project, Core, FOA-specific, etc.) Funding opportunity announcements will clearly specify the types of components that will be required in complex application submissions for that opportunity.
- **Summaries: As part of the application image creation process, ASSIST will automatically generate summaries of budgets and other information** compiled from the data provided in the individual components (e.g., component and categorical roll-ups of budget data). These summaries help reviewers and NIH staff work with the application.

2. How can I control the order in which components appear in the application image?

Components *of the same type* are presented in the image in the order they were created in ASSIST. Therefore, some planning should be done before initiating components. Once you know the general structure of your application (number of components and the title, project start/end dates of each) you can initiate all the components in the desired order providing only the minimal data requested to save each component. This will give you a basic application shell that everyone working on the application can fill out over time.

Note: We do maintain an ASSIST enhancement wish list. The ability to reorder components is on that list. Hopefully we will be able to build this capability in the future, but we can't make any promises.

3. How do I differentiate the PDs/PIs for the entire application from the lead of an individual component?

The contact Project Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) and any multiple-PDs/PIs for the entire application must be listed on the R&R Senior/Key Person Profile form of the Overall component. Only the PDs/PIs for the entire application can use the role of PD/PI.

Within components, ASSIST will default the role in the PD/PI section of the R&R Senior/Key Person Profile form to 'Project Lead'. The default value should be used unless there are explicit announcement instructions to change it.

The eRA Commons IDs for both the PDs/PIs for the entire application and the component Project Leads must be included in the Credential field of the R&R Senior/Key Person Profile form.

4. Can a PD/PI be included on more than one component?

Absolutely, we expect it to be fairly common for the PD/PIs to have roles on multiple components in addition to the Overall component.

PD/PIs for the entire application are identified on the Overall component and the role of PD/PI should be used. In other components, their role should reflect the work they are doing in that component (e.g., Project Lead, Center Director). Also, since there is no budget form in the Overall component, their effort should be recorded on the budget form in the components in which the work takes place.

5. Can someone be listed as a Senior/Key person on multiple components?

The same person can be listed as a senior/key person on multiple components. However, only a single 4-page biosketch is allowed for each senior/key person regardless of the number of components they participate on. When the applicant organization attempts to change the status of a component to Final, ASSIST will automatically alert the user that multiple biosketches for a single person have been included and the user will have the option to select which biosketch to include with the submission.

6. How do I add a cover letter to my application?

The Overall component of NIH applications includes an optional PHS Cover Letter form. Since the form is optional, it will not automatically appear in the form tab navigation of the component. While on the Summary page of the Overall component, click on the Add Optional Form button under Actions. You will be presented with the list of available optional forms. Select PHS Cover Letter and the form will be added to the form tab navigation.

7. How do I add a subaward budget to my application?

Many components within NIH applications includes an optional Subaward Budget form. Since the form is optional, it will not automatically appear in the form tab navigation of the component. While on the Summary page of the component, click on the Add Optional Form button under Actions. You will be presented with the list of available optional forms. Select Subaward Budget and the form will be added to the form tab navigation.

E. Managing Application Access

1. What privileges are automatically available in ASSIST based on the role associated with my eRA Commons account?

Some privileges are automatically available based on the organization and roles associated with the eRA Commons ID used to access ASSIST. Since these privileges cannot be individually granted or revoked in ASSIST, the Manage Access interface does not display all users that hold these automatic privileges.

Signing Official (SO) at the lead application organization:

- Initiate application
- Assign, modify, or revoke application access for other users
- Delegate ability to assign, modify, or revoke application access for other users
- Edit entire application
- Submit application (must be SO at lead applicant organization AND have valid Grants.gov Authorized Organization Representative credentials)

Administrative Official (AO) at the lead applicant organization:

- Initiate application
- Assign, modify, or revoke application access for others
- Delegate ability to assign, modify, or revoke application access for others
- Edit entire application

Principal Investigator (PI) identified on an application:

- Initiate application
- Edit entire application

Once the DUNS number is entered on the SF424 R&R for a component, then similar automatic privileges apply for that specific component.

2. How do I allow a user without automatic access to work on an application?

ASSIST allows application access to be controlled across three variables:

- Edit vs. View
- Entire application vs. specific component within an application
- Budget data vs. Non-Budget data

Signing Officials (SOs) at the applicant organization automatically have the Access Maintainer role which allows them to manage access for other users using the Manage Access Action.

F. Checking Your Application Against Grants.gov and NIH Business Rules

1. Does ASSIST check applications against both federal-wide and NIH business rules?

Yes, ASSIST performs multiple levels of business rule checking.

1. ASSIST checks application data as it is entered against the rules defined by Grants.gov for each form.
2. ASSIST provides the option to 'Validate' the application against NIH's agency-specific business rules prior to submission.
3. ASSIST checks for the most frequent Grants.gov rejection errors prior to submission.

Note: The Annotated Forms found on the public Applying Electronically website

(<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/ElectronicReceipt/communication.htm#forms>) are a good reference for the data collection included with each form and the validation rules enforced by ASSIST.

G. Previewing Your Application

1. Will I be able to see my application the way NIH would present it to reviewers before I submit?

ASSIST has a Preview feature that allows users to view a draft of the application image. With the exception of Grants.gov tracking number and submission timestamp in footer, the image will be exactly the same as will be seen by reviewers and NIH staff. The Preview feature is available to any user with sufficient application privileges to view the entire application (i.e., any SO/AO at the applicant organization, and PD/PI in the Overall component, and other users that have been granted View or Edit access to the entire application.)

2. How is the application image assembled? Is the data compiled in a specific order?

The table of contents, summaries, bookmarks, headers, footers, and page numbers are automatically generated.

The application image will display the Overall component first, followed by summaries, and then the additional component types in alphabetical order. Components of the same type will be grouped together and will be displayed in the order in which they were created in ASSIST.

Example 1: Opportunity has an Overall component and some combination of Admin Core, Core and Project components.

- Overall
- Summaries
- *Admin Core*
- All components of type *Core* (in the order created in ASSIST)
- All components of type *Project* (in the order created in ASSIST)

Example 2: Opportunity has an Overall component and some combination of Admin Core, Clinical Core, Research Core, Service Core and Project components.

- Overall
- Summaries
- *Admin Core*
- All components of type *Clinical Core* (in the order created in ASSIST)

- All components of type *Project* (in the order created in ASSIST)
- All components of type *Research Core* (in the order created in ASSIST)
- All components of type *Service Core* (in the order created in ASSIST)

3. What types of data summaries are automatically included in the application image?

Summaries compiled from component data will be included for:

- Project Performance Sites
- Human Subjects, Clinical Trial, HESC, and Vertebrate Animal information
- Budget Information
- Sr/Key personnel
 - PD/PIs for the entire application are listed first followed by all other Senior/Key personnel in alphabetical order. Biosketches follow the list of personnel in the same order and are not repeated within the individual components.

H. Submitting and Tracking Your Application

1. Who can submit an application in ASSIST?

In order to submit an application, your Commons ID used to login to ASSIST must have the Signing Official (SO) role with the applicant organization. In addition, you will need to provide active Grants.gov Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) credentials.

2. How do I prepare my application for submission?

Once all application components have a status of 'Final', you will need to set the Application Status to 'All Components Final.' Go to the Application Information screen (you may need to use the bread crumbs at the top of the page) and use the Update Submission Status button under Actions to change the status.

Before an application can be submitted, it must pass validations. To perform validations against the application use the Validate Application button from the Actions section while on the Application Information screen. When an application passes validations (i.e., no Errors identified), its status is updated to 'All Components Validated'.

You can then update the status to Ready for Submission and submit the application.

3. How do I track my ASSIST submission?

In December 2012, NIH will release new ASSIST features that will allow users to track Grants.gov and eRA Commons submission status within ASSIST. Until then, standard Grants.gov and eRA Commons tracking features can be used.

4. If I'm the Project Lead of a Component, can I track the application submission status?

Submission status can only be tracked in Grants.gov by an Authorized Organization Representative (AOR).

Submission status can only be tracked by applicant organization Signing Officials (SOs), applicant organization Administrative officials (AOs), the Project Directors/Principal Investigators (PIs) for the application and Assistants (ASSTs) with delegated Status authority.

I. Getting Help

1. Where can I find additional resources to help with using ASSIST?

On-line help is available at: <http://era.nih.gov/erahelp/ASSIST/>.

2. Who do I ask for help with the ASSIST system?

Please contact:

eRA Commons Help Desk

Web: <http://era.nih.gov/help/>
Toll-free: 1-866-504-9552
Phone: 301-402-7469
TTY: 301-451-5939
Hours: Mon-Fri, 7a.m. to 8 p.m. Eastern Time

3. What do I do if problems with ASSIST threaten my ability to submit an application on time?

Please follow our standard [Guidelines for Applicants Experiencing System Issues](#).

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XII. FAQs Foreign Organizations

1. I am an international registrant and cannot access the SAM website. Why and what do I do?

A technical or security issue may be preventing you from accessing the SAM website. Please visit this Federal Service Desk FAQ for guidance on how to proceed: <https://www.fsd.gov/app/answers/list>.

2. I am an international registrant and cannot access the NATO CAGE Code website. Why and what do I do?

In certain circumstances, specific locations may be blocked for technical or security reasons. If you cannot access the website, please visit this Federal Service Desk FAQ for guidance on how to proceed: https://www.fsd.gov/app/answers/detail/a_id/564/kw/international.

3. I am an applicant who lives outside the U.S. and am unable to access the System for Award Management (SAM) site. What should I do?

A few countries may have trouble accessing the [SAM](#) website. The applicant should send an email to security@bpn.gov and copy the NIH Electronic Submission mailbox at NIHElectronicSubmiss@mail.nih.gov.

4. Are International Organizations required to hold a DUNS and register in Grants.gov?

Yes.

5. Can I register my organization in Commons in my native language?

We can accept any foreign names that use the english alphabet. Unfortunately our systems cannot accept special characters.

6. Are there any tips to assist foreign organizations while registering in eRA Commons?

Keep these handy pointers in mind while registering in eRA Commons. Applicant organizations:

- Must have a DUNS number before registering in the eRA Commons. This DUNS number must match the DUNS number provided at the SAM registration with Grants.gov.
- Must have a valid e-mail and should ensure that any filters on their email do not interfere with NIH email. Must also keep in mind that the sooner they reply to emails, the faster NIH can complete their registration.

7. Some of the data fields in the 424 (R&R) do not really apply to foreign organizations. How will this be handled?

For some of the data, special instructions are included in the Application Guide for foreign organizations.

8. Are International organizations required to obtain an EIN number as part of the grant submission process?

NIH does not require international organizations to obtain an EIN number for application submission. International organizations may use 44-4444444 for the Employer Identification field in the SF424 (R&R) Cover Component of the application package. [See [NIH eSubmission Tips for International Applicants](#) (PDF - 343 KB)].

9. How do I know if a foreign organization is eligible to apply?

Each funding opportunity has a section for Eligibility. In that section there will be a clear statement about whether foreign institutions are eligible to apply

10. Which budget form should I use if I am a foreign organization?

Foreign institutions must use the Research and Related Budget form.

11. On the SF424 (RR) application the field for "state" appears to be required. What do I do?

Make sure you select your country first. If you select a country other than the US or Canada, the state field will become optional. Inclusion of Providence is required for Canada.

12. How does the system handle phone numbers in different formats?

The phone number field on the SF424 (RR) application has a 25 character limit, but no specific format requirements.

13. What should I include in the Congressional District filed?

Foreign institutions should use 00-000 for the Congressional District.

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XIII. FAQs for Small Businesses

1. Please see OER Website for Small Business Frequently Asked Questions.

Please refer to the [Small Business FAQs](#) on the OER website for information about preparing and submitting a Small Business application

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XIV. Using a Service Provider

1. What is a Service Provider?

A Service Provider is a commercial company that assists applicants, for a fee, in submitting grant applications electronically to NIH. For more information visit the [Service Providers](#) page.

2. **As I understand it, there is more than one way for applicants to apply electronically --software that can be downloaded from Grants.gov or Service Provider software that is specific to each provider. True?**

Yes. Additional information can be found on the [Service Providers](#) page.

3. **Could NIH recommend a particular Service Provider?**

No. NIH works closely with the Service Providers but cannot endorse any one Service Provider.

4. **If an applicant organization uses a Service Provider, who is responsible for completing the application, the PI, the organization, or the Service Provider?**

The Authorized Organizational Representative is the person responsible, but how this process works within an organization and a service provider system varies.

5. **Where can I obtain information on service providers?**

Please visit the [Service Providers](#) page. NIH cannot endorse any service provider or commercial business.

6. **If an applicant is using a service provider, can they print out their application or portions of their application (i.e. - the budget pages) before submission and acceptance by Grants.gov and NIH?**

It depends on the capabilities of the Service Provider. Some Service Providers do provide this capability.

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