

Preparation and Submission of Electronic Competing Grant Applications to NIH

Investigators should also refer to *General Instructions for Grants.gov and the Use of the OSP Server and Preparing an Electronic Application to NIH – A Quick Reference Guide*, both available on the OSP website at <http://www.bu.edu/osp/electronic/index.html>.

Overview:

The submission of electronic applications to NIH involves interaction between two systems: Grants.gov (<http://www.grants.gov>) and the NIH eRA Commons (<https://commons.era.nih.gov>). After an application is submitted to Grants.gov, it is retrieved by the Commons system. The Commons system validates the application against NIH business rules and against the information stored in the PI's Commons profile; that is, the system checks for errors and inconsistencies. The PI and the Signing Official are notified of the results of the validation by e-mail. PIs and OSP staff can also log onto the Commons system and use the "Status" feature of Commons to view the results of the validation. If errors are found, the application must be corrected and resubmitted through Grants.gov (please see "Submitting Corrected Applications," below). **An application with errors will not be processed by NIH.** The system may also find warnings. PIs are not required to correct warnings. The application will be processed by NIH even if warnings are present. Once an error-free version of the application is accepted by Commons, the application image will be available in the Commons system for two business days. PIs are encouraged to view their applications in the Commons during the two-day window, as it is the only opportunity for the PI to see the application in its final form before it is sent to reviewers. After the two day window, the application automatically moves forward for processing by the Center for Scientific Review.

Preparing to submit a proposal:

- Individual investigators do not need to register with the Grants.gov system; however, anyone planning to appear on an NIH application as a PI or as a Senior/Key Person **must** be a registered Commons user. Individuals should contact either Kathleen Foster (kfoster@bu.edu) or Eleanor Greene (ergreene@bu.edu) to request a Commons account. Commons registration can take up to five business days. PIs, Co-PIs and Senior/Key Persons must include their Commons usernames on the NIH application.
- PIs must fill out all sections of their personal profile in Commons as thoroughly as possible. The "Employments" section of the personal profile is particularly important for the PI. The PI **must** show Boston University as his primary place of employment and enter his preferred employment address. It is important to place a check mark in the boxes that correspond to both primary place of employment and preferred employment address.
- Investigators are urged to familiarize themselves with the new *NIH SF 424 R&R Application Guide* (http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/424/SF424_RR_Guide_General.doc). The Guide contains detailed information about completing the NIH SF 424R&R application forms and specifies the fields that are required by NIH. Please note: the following fields required by NIH are not highlighted as required by the Grants.gov system:
 1. "Credential, e.g. agency login" field on the Research & Related Senior/Key Person Profile form
 2. PI/PD effort (either calendar or academic year, but not both) on the Research & Related Budget form
- Faculty members planning to submit a proposal to NIH should visit the Grants.gov website and download the application package specific to the program to which they are planning to apply. Investigators can no longer use a generic forms kit to apply for NIH grants. Each NIH program and funding mechanism now has its own, unique application package which must be downloaded from Grants.gov. PIs should use the NIH Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) number as a reference when downloading an application package from Grants.gov.
- In order to allow time for correction and resubmission of your application, if needed, the OSP AD assigned to your school or department will submit your completed application via Grants.gov three (3) days before the NIH application deadline. NIH statistics indicate that most electronic applications must be submitted more than once before they are accepted by the Commons; therefore, your OSP AD must have sufficient time to review and submit your application before the federal deadline. **Five (5) business days before the NIH deadline, OSP must receive the following: (a) a completed electronic copy of your application (via the OSP server) and (b) a paper copy of your application consisting of:**

- NIH application face page (SF 424 R&R),
- Budget pages for all years of the project,
- Budget justification,
- Abstract or Statement of Work,
- BU Proposal Summary Form signed by the PI and all appropriate university officials,
- BU Conflict of Interest Disclosure Form, and
- BU Export Control Checklist.

Completing the application forms:

- PIs should consult the new *NIH SF 424 R&R Application Guide* for detailed instructions on completing the application forms.
- Although the Grants.gov system will permit uploaded documents in a wide variety of file formats, NIH will accept only PDF files. NIH has posted a long list of potential errors associated with PDF documents at: http://era.nih.gov/ElectronicReceipt/pdf_guidelines.htm.
- The “Credential, e.g. agency login” field on the Research & Related Senior/Key Person Profile form is required for each individual listed as either PI, Co-PI or Senior/Key Person on the application – a valid Commons username **must** be entered into this field for each individual. It is a required field, and failure to include this information will prevent the application from being accepted by the eRA Commons system.
- When a particular funding mechanism allows either modular or non-modular budgets, both the modular and non-modular budget forms will be included in the application package under “Optional Documents.” Although both forms will appear in the “optional documents” section, one or the other of the budget forms must be completed.
- Non-Modular Budgets: PI effort (either calendar or academic year, but not both) and Funds Requested for the PI must be completed. The Effort and Funds Requested fields are not highlighted as “required” by Grants.gov but NIH requires their completion. In addition, the person-months represented must be greater than zero (0) and cannot extend more than two decimal places.
- Pay careful attention to the “Project Narrative” field on the Research and Related Other Project Information form. This field should be used to upload a brief “relevancy statement” in accordance with the instructions in the *NIH SF 424 R&R Application Guide*. This field should NOT be used to upload the Research Plan.

Submitting Corrected Applications:

During the initial transition to electronic submission for each funding mechanism, investigators will have 5 business days beyond the deadline to correct validation errors. NIH has indicated that in the future, the five-day correction window will not be available. PIs should plan to submit enough in advance of the deadline to allow time to correct any errors before the deadline date.

- If errors are found by the eRA Commons validation process, the application must be corrected and resubmitted through Grants.gov. Anytime a corrected application is resubmitted, Box 1 (“Type of Submission”) on the SF 424 R&R Application must be changed to indicate “Changed/Corrected Application.” When the Changed/Corrected Application button is clicked, Box 4, “Federal Identifier,” will become active. Investigators should enter “N/A” into Box 4.
 - Please note that Box 8 (“Type of Application”) should remain “New.”

Once an error free version of the application appears in the Commons system, PIs are strongly encouraged to view their application image. This is the only opportunity the PI will have to be certain that the application has been received in exactly the format he or she intended. It is possible that the PI will notice a problem with the way the application has been transmitted from Grants.gov to the Commons (for example, a PDF document is not legible or is missing). In this case, he can ask the Office of Sponsored Programs to “reject” the application. If the PI chooses to resubmit the rejected application and the deadline has passed, in addition to the steps outlined above he or she will need to include an explanation of the reason for the resubmission in the form of a cover letter attached to the application.