The Shared Path of eRA Commons and the Grant Process

Session Transcript: 2022-2023 NIH Grants Conference

Jade Blevins: Introduce to you Anastasiya Hardison, a CRM, customer relationship manager. We love our acronyms here at NIH. And she's going to take us through our presentation.

Anastasiya Hardison: Hi, everyone. I am really excited to be here and doing this presentation for you. So let's go ahead and get started. We have a lot of information crammed, like Jade said, into a very short amount of time. So let's go ahead and get started. So our path today, we're going to start with an overview of eRA Commons, talk about our PI and SO searches, which has some new information, detailed status information, Just-in-Time, your personal profile, institution profile, roles and delegations within eRA Commons, no-cost extensions, administrative supplements, annual RPPRs, the Research Progress Performance Reports, the interim and final RPPRs, our publications, and then our closeout. As you can imagine, this is all a lot of information, and there are even components of Commons that we will not be able to touch on here. So I encourage anyone, if you have any questions, please reach out to us, and we are happy, we are always happy to help. So what is eRA Commons, and what does it do? So it is an online interface where grant applicants, grantees and federal staff have access to share administrative information and submit reports information, look up information about their grants applications and awards and research grants. There is a lot of components to this. It is role-driven. And there is lots of new things and look and feel that has come out over the last several years. The first component I wanted to talk about the is PI status and the SO status. These screens are - the SO status came out very recently. It has been updated to allow signing officials to view and search for information relevant to their grants and their applications in a more streamlined method. The PI search has been out for a number of years, and now we've finally been able to go ahead and make the upgrade to the signing official search. What you'll find here is, we have more streamlined searches. We have more components. It's a cleaner look and feel. We have specific - we have different search types that folks are able to perform. There's the general search, which you're familiar with Just-in-Time recently awarded. We have the ability to go into the ASSIST module to do searches there, early-stage investigator eligibility search, all sorts of different components. When you select search type, the screen is going to change dynamically for you and give you the elements that you can search by. Hopefully this will enable you to get to your information faster and in a more streamlined process. After you've performed the search, you'll be presented with your information. Clicking on this meatball menu, it's what we call it, will give you the ability to see different menu items. So depending on the status of the grant or the application, you'll have different things available, different options available. Furthermore, if you click on the grant number, it's going to go ahead and take you on to your detailed status information page, which is your - we also call it the grant folder. This is the section that has all of your relevant grant information, things like your contacts, so if you want to contact your grants management specialist or your program official, that information is going to be here. Any updates regarding what's happened with your grant application, especially when it's moving through the review process, is going to be there as well. We have resources and shortcuts to get you to the service desk as well as all of the relevant dates and information for the grant. You also have some control buttons in the upper right-hand corner so you can expand all the sections, collapse them or print the status information screen in case you have any additional information. All of your documents related to the grant are also going to be located here. The Just-in-Time in the SO Search Screen is going to be really helpful to you. It will allow you to find any grants that have a Just-in-Time requested. Something that is very important for you to remember with Just-in-Time is that we will reach out to you if this information is requested. So what that means is that if you have, just because you have a link for Just-in-Time does not mean that you are being requested to submit information. You should wait until NIH has reached out to you to request this before you go ahead and start submitting this information. Very quickly, Just-in-Time is going to be what allows an applicant to submit additional grant application information after the completion of the peer review but prior to funding. A Just-in-Time link or a request from NIH is not an indicator that the grant award will be made, so just be aware of that. This screen is going to be available to signing officials and your PIs. The signing official is going to be the one who is going to be submitting the Just-in-Time information, but the PI is able to upload information. Next section is the personal profile. So everybody that has access to eRA Commons has a personal profile. This is going to contain information regarding to the individual things like their name, their address, demographic information if it's applicable to their role, their education level, so if they have a scientific role like a PDPI or a trainee, the education information is going to be very important. This section is also where you can go to determine eligibility for new investigator, early-stage investigator, which is important for new grant applicants, and then also determining if a reviewer has eligibility for continuous submission. The other important screen for us to be aware of is the Institution Profile, the IPF. This is the central repository for all of your institution's information. Every organization has one. And based on your roles, you will be able to see and/or update different information for your institution profile. Only the signing official can edit the IPF information, and for anyone else, this will be displayed as read-only. This section also has your basic assurances and certifications. The institution profile screen is going to give you some very important elements. The SAM registration expiration date is very important because if your SAM registration has expired, you will not be able to submit a grant application. So please be aware of that. The name, address, institution contact information, list of signing officials are all here. The institution - I apologize. There is also a field in here for your point of contact for your institution as well as your e-mail addresses as to who should be contacted for specific areas, like your notice of award, financial conflict of interest, things like that. So it is very important to make sure that that information is up to date as well. eRA Commons user roles, this is a very hot topic. We get a lot of questions about it. What roles should an individual have? Based on the roles that you have, you will see the system differently. We have a full list that's printable of the eRA Commons roles and their descriptions here. It's very helpful if you're trying to determine which roles to grant to an individual. The signing official role is the key one. This is the person that has signatory authority to legally bind the organization on grant administration matters. It is very important that you guys have more than one signing official account with your institution because only a signing official can create another one of these roles. And they are the ones who are going to be doing, have the AOR role in grants.gov and be able to submit an application. So you don't want to find yourself in a situation where your signing official has left, and there's no longer a signing official at your institution who can do that at the time of grant application submission. The signing official is going to be responsible for maintaining institutional information on your IPF, Institution Profile, like we just talked about. Submitting documents that require signature authority to act on behalf of the organization. I apologize. And then they're also going to be responsible for managing accounts. There are other roles, there's the administrative official, who can also create accounts for your institution, but the signing official is the one who can grant all roles, so things like financial conflict of interest, that's going to be granted by your signing official. So you want to make sure you have the appropriate staff with the appropriate roles. So managing accounts, signing official and account administrators have responsibility of ensuring that duplicate accounts are note created for users. Scientific accounts, like your PDPIs, are going to have just one account through the entirety of their career. The goal here is to make sure that we can accurately track their grant history and so that the PDPI is able to access all of their grant information. If you create multiple accounts, then the PI is going to have to contact the service desk and request that their accounts be collapsed. So we ask that, before you create an account for an individual, for a scientific individual, so your trainees, your predocs, postdocs, PIs, that, one, you ask them, "Do you know if you have an eRA Commons account?" and then, two, that you run a search across eRA Commons in the Account Management System in AMS to determine if there is someone with that name that already exists. Account tips, I kind of already touched on this before, but please designate more than one signing official. It will help your institution in the long run, especially if a signing official, the one signing official is unavailable or leaves the institution. And then also always make sure to check if a new account coming in with a scientific role already exists. If they already have an account with a different organization, all you need to do is create an affiliation with your institution. Once you do that, that user will have access to both institutions. There's no limit to how many affiliations a scientific account can have.

Jade Blevins: I'm going to break in here just to make a plea is if you do find a user's account that you think is the right one, please confirm with that person that they did in fact have a Commons account. We've had a few cases recently where some older accounts from way back when all of a sudden got affiliated, and they weren't quite sure. So don't just rely on first name and last name. Ask the person, "Do you recognize this account?" It'll benefit you all in the future.

Anastasiya Hardison: Yes, please. All right. User delegations. One of the elements within working with Commons is the ability to delegate permissions to do specific actions on behalf of an individual. These delegations extend from working on progress reports. For example, a PI may have an assistant that was going to help them complete their RPPR. Maybe they are a PI that has a training grant. They'd like someone to help them complete all the appointment forms. They can delegate xTrain in that case. Signing officials can delegate progress report submission to PIs for grants that are SNAP-eligible. So it is up to your institution as far as delegating submit privileges to a PI. Keep in mind, if you delegate to a PI, that's going to be for all of their RPPRs that are eligible for a PI to submit. You can't limit it to one specific grant. There's a number of delegations. We have very good documentation on our information page. Folks can delegate their personal profile to be updated by someone else within the institution. There's lots of different things that are available to folks. No-cost extension from status. So the extension link: so when you get to the end of your project period, within 90 days of the project period end date, if your institution has expanded authority, which you can see in your notice of award, you will see a link, the signing official will see a link for an extension. This is by clicking on those three dots that I talked about earlier. If you see this extension 90 days before your project period, you can click on it and it will open up. I was hoping it was going to show me the screenshot. Give me one second. It will open up the screen for you where you're able to select the number of months, up to 12 months, and then it will calculate your new date. I'm going to go back, I apologize, I should have organized this a little differently. This no-cost extension is going to give you the ability to extend your grant for up to 12 months. Only the signing official can submit it. It can be done 90 days before the project period end date, but no later than the project period end date. So if you miss your project period end date, you're not going to be able to do this through status, unfortunately. And once you do this, this will happen automatically. We'll send a notification to NIH Grants Management Staff that you've processed this extension and your project will automatically be extended for those 12, for however long you request, up to 12 months. Go ahead, the next slide. All right. But what happens if you don't have expanded authority, or you've already had a no-cost extension before, or maybe something happened, and you were not able to submit your no-cost extension until after your project period end date? Then you have the prior approval module where you can submit a request to extend your project, once again, for up to 12 months. This is not going to be automatic. This is going to go to your grants management staff and your program staff. And it's going to be up to the IC to review and approve or deny this request. But it does give you the ability to communicate with NIH through the eRA Commons application. So you'll go into prior approval. You'll select the no-cost extension request, and then you'll complete the form and submit it to NIH. So as I mentioned earlier, you can do a no-cost extension through prior approval when you've already used a no-cost extension previously when you do not have expanded authority or within 90 days of your project period end date or when you've passed the project period end date, but you have not yet closed the grant or gone into unilateral close-out, which is 120 days from the project period. Administrative supplements are there to request additional funds during a current project period, to provide for an increase in costs due to unforeseen circumstances. We allow requesting additional funds, has to be within the scope of a peer review and approval - I apologize. Requested additional costs must be within the scope of the peer-reviewed and approved project. So it has to be within scope, but you are able to come into Commons, click on the administrative supp button and complete the request. When you come in, there are three methods that you can do this, initiate in ASSIST through a funding opportunity announcement and enter the information manually, initiate in ASSIST with a federal ID number of the parent grant where some of the information from the parent award is going to prepopulate for you or initiate in eRA Commons, and we will redirect you to ASSIST where some of the information is going to prepopulate for you, and you'll complete the form. Next is your progress report. So you've got your funding, you've gone through most of a year of your research project, and now it's time to submit your Research Performance Progress Report. It's federally mandated. It's a format used across all agencies that provide research grants and contacts. It's used to document your accomplishments and compliance with the terms of the award and then describe the scientific progress, identify significant changes, report on personnel and describe the plan for subsequent budget period or year for annual reports. There are several annual report types. We have your regular, which is a single-project RPPR. It's due prior to the next year's award. We have multicomponent RPPRs. The PI is going to identify if the RPPR should contain components corresponding with the structure of the originally submitted application. So if you submitted a multicomponent application, multiple components got awarded, you want to make sure that your RPPR matches. And then there's the multiyear funded RPPR. Multiyear funded progress reports are now also use the RPPR format and the link is going to be available for this under the three dot ellipsis icon in status. Multiproject RPPR components on the RPPR screen, we will automatically show what we have in our system in your menu screen. The list of components displayed will be from the last competitive application that was awarded. The add component button is going to allow you to select the components from the existing application components list display, and you can edit and modify the components for the RPPR as necessary. RPPRs can contain budgets. This is going to depend on whether you are a SNAP award or a non-SNAP, so the Streamlined Noncompeting Application Process. If your grant is a non-SNAP award, you are going to have to submit a budget. It's going to be either the R&R budget or the PHS 398 budget. The PHS 398 is just for your training grants. If you are unsure of which budget you should use, take a look at what you submitted on your grant application and that's going to let you know. For help with those budgets, this information can be found in the SF424 R&R user guide. RPPR and Human Subjects: The human subjects data is entered in the human subjects system, HSS. It's the electronic system to manage human subjects and clinical trials information and allows the principal investigator and signing official to access and update the human subjects and clinical trials data associated with their grant. You can update the participant information, enrollment information, inform NIH of clinicaltrials.gov registration and review other human subjects-related information as necessary, Just-in-Time for the award or after the award is made. So you can access the HSS system from the RPPR through section G.4.b in the inclusion enrollment data of the RPPR. The human subjects link is visible only for NIH applicants and grants involving human subjects. So there's three variations of RPPRs in general. So we have our three variations of annual RPPRs. Now we have three variations of RPPR as a whole. We have our annual RPPR. Those are done every year. The link is going to appear the day after the project segment end date. The annual RPPR is due for SNAP awards 45 days before the next project period end date - start date. I apologize. And then the non-SNAP is due 60 days before the next budget period start date. I'm not going to go through the whole list, but very useful information if you have questions with the RPPR. Now, when you get to the end of your project, you have two types of RPPRs that are available to you. They are functionally the same form. They're just called different things. The interim RPPR is the RPPR that you would submit if you successfully competed on your renewal. So you submitted a Type 2 application. Your competitive renewal has been reviewed. It has been awarded. So then you would submit an interim RPPR. If, on the other hand, you decided not to recompete and your grant is done, you've completed your research and you go into closeout, you will submit a final RPPR. Now, if let's say you submitted a Type 2 to compete, but you've already submitted a final RPPR. You did not have your Type 2 application submitted and went ahead and submitted a final RPPR. And then you decide, "You know what? I don't want to closeout. I actually want to recompete." If that happens and you have the Type 2 come through and it gets funded, the system is actually going to flip your final RPPR into an interim RPPR. There's nothing you need to do. So just be aware of that. If you're coming in and you see an interim RPPR link and you feel that you're actually going to go into closeout, that's fine. Complete the interim RPPR. Once you go through closeout, we'll flip it over to final RPPR. So - and this is actually - should have skipped ahead to this. This is actually talking about that. So if you compete and your interim RPPR is submitted, you get funded for your Type 2, it's accepted, your interim RPPR is accepted. And then if you're not funded, your interim RPPR is going to be accepted as a final RPPR. Your interim and your final RPPR both have Section H: Outcomes. The information in the outcome section will be publicly available. It should be written at a high level and in plain language. There's even a link where you can see an example of what we're looking for as far as language and level of detail in this. This section is, as I said, going to be made public. It's going to be available in RePORTER to increase transparency with the general public and regarding NIH funding. The reporting on the outcome section is limited by a federal-wide mandate, I would add, to 8,000 characters. So it's some, but it's not huge. So please be aware. And the outcomes should provide a concise summary of the findings of the award written in lay language for the general public. Please don't put anything proprietary in there because it will be made available publicly. Progress reports have additional, progress report additional materials, PRAM. This feature is to allow IC staff, grants management and program staff - the request is going to come from grants management, but the request might also be submitted because a program official had a question. This allows for you to submit additional information after your report has been submitted, your RPPR has been submitted. There are two types of PRAMs. For your annual RPPRs, we have your Public Access PRAM. This is going to be generally automatic if your publications are not in compliance with the public access policy. And then there's the Agency-requested PRAM. It's only available if requested by the grants management specialist, by the GMS, and it could be requesting any number of things from you. The PI can enter the PRAM but only submit it if they are delegated submit progress report authority by their signing official. Otherwise, only the signing official can submit the PRAM to the agency. Now, please keep in mind, you can't delegate submit PRAM separately. So it's going to be all or nothing. Either your PI can submit the RPPR and the PRAM, or they can't submit either of them. Closeout. So you've completed, you've had an R01. You completed 5 years of research. Maybe you requested your no-cost extension. You've completed your no-cost extension. Now it's time for closeout. Electronically submitted, sorry, electronically submit requires closeout documents for grants in the closeout status. Closeout items for NIH include the final Research Progress Performance Report, the F-RPPR: Federal Financial Report, an FRR, and then the final invention statement. NIH automatically marks grants as ready for closeout, making the links appear in Commons when the project period end date has passed and there's no Type 2 application submitted. So when you come in to your search, you can do a closeout search. You can limit, you can, sorry, you can check whether you want to find grants that require your final RPPR, or maybe you just want to see what's missing, final invention statements, or maybe it requires a FRAM. You can also see which grants have gone into unilateral closeout or require closeout, lots of different search parameters to help you identify where you need to focus. just like for the annual RPPR, we have FRAM and IRAM for additional materials for your either final RPPR or your interim RPPR. These are going to be the same as the IC-requested PRAM on your annual RPPR. The IC is going to request additional materials from you. It'll trigger an e-mail for the PI and the SO. And then the FRAM update or IRAM link are going to appear in your action column. So this is a screenshot of what the PI will see in their status, and here they have an IRAM request that's available for them to click on and go and fill out. Final research report additional materials, from the SO search results, they can, they would select their closeout and search for their grant. They can check the requires FRAM checkbox in search, so they do that, clicking on the application ID and opening the grant folder, they'll actually be able to find the request and other relevant documents section. So here's the FRAM request that they have. Okay. Thank you, everyone.

Jade Blevins: All right. Anastasiya, thank you. We made it through. I'm so impressed. We have had a few questions here, so I'm going to take this time and let you try and answer some.

Anastasiya Hardison: Excellent.

Jade Blevins: Our most recent, "After unilateral closeout, PIs and SOs no longer have the ability to submit documents, but reports remain on the closeout status page. Are the SOs meant to take any further action?"

Anastasiya Hardison: Is it closed, or is it in unilateral closeout?

Jade Blevins: Yeah, that would be the question. So if it is in unilateral closeout, then you can still submit. If it has been unilaterally closed, then no further actions are needed.

Anastasiya Hardison: Right.

Jade Blevins: But that's a significantly long time after things should have been done.

Anastasiya Hardison: Yep. You can also always reach out to the grants management specialist if there's documents that you would like to submit.

Jade Blevins: Let's see. Looking through here.

Anastasiya Hardison: Thought there, I thought I saw someone have a prior-approval question. I don't know if anyone answered it, but it's my ...

Jade Blevins: We did have a prior - one of her favorite modules - prior approval asking whether it was required or requested ...

Anastasiya Hardison: It is ...

Jade Blevins: ... to be used.

Anastasiya Hardison: Currently ... well, what I would suggest is that talk with your IC. Every institute does things a little differently. So what I would suggest is reaching out to them. It is very helpful using the prior approval module because it puts everything into grant folder. But it may behoove you to speak with your grant management specialist and ask what they would prefer. At this time is it not mandated. However, that may change, so ...

Jade Blevins: It is fully closed. Yeah, if it is unilaterally closed, you do not need to take any more action. If it makes you feel better to submit reports, if the links are still there, you should be able to, but it is no longer required.

Anastasiya Hardison: I'm writing this down because I want to take a look at it a little bit more too.

Jade Blevins: Got a question about, can only SO and PI see closeout details?

Anastasiya Hardison: Ooh. Yes? Yes.

Jade Blevins: Yes, I think those are the only people who can. We can check our ... I would confirm with our documentation about what delegations can do if you delegated and ...

Anastasiya Hardison: I believe we allowed interim and final RPPR delegation, but I need to double-check that because I know that was an ask. I can't remember right now if it's there. I apologize.

Jade Blevins: We've got users in the chat saying assist roles can see it too. So if you are an assist, you can see it. Thank you, everyone, for saving us from ourselves ...

Anastasiya Hardison: Right?

Jade Blevins: ... over here. Let's see. Are PRAM and FRAM only needed when requested?

Anastasiya Hardison: Correct. We will. So you will never see ... Unlike a JIT, you will never a link for a PRAM or a FRAM unless it has been requested by the IC. So if you see a PRAM, FRAM, IRAM, please respond to it. Your grants management specialist would like a thing.

Jade Blevins: Yes, we also have a public access RAM, which will automatically created if any of your, if any of the publications in there are not compliant at time of submission, so that one you want to answer too because they're going to want to know why that is or if you've made improvements to that situation. Got 5 more minutes. I'm trying to ... IC is institute or center. For example, NCI, National Cancer Institute, is your IC. Typically it's in your grant number. It's the two letters in there. And it is the ... usually it's the awarding institution. You're welcome. Some questions about affiliations, but those have been answered. You can ... so, how to add affiliations to folks.

Anastasiya Hardison: So if you want to affiliate somebody. Let's say you know, you have a PI. You know that they're at a university, and they're coming to work with you as well. When you search for them in accounts management, in AMS, you will be able to have the option to affiliate them with your institution. Once you do so, it'll add whatever role that you want to them. And then they'll, when they log into eRA Commons, they'll be able to pick whether they want to to see eRA Commons from the perspective of being affiliated with your institution or their other institution. If someone leaves your institution, you also want to unaffiliate them so that they don't maintain access to your, to the system. But it's also up to you how quickly you want to do that.

Jade Blevins: All right. I think we may be good to go. We had a question about expanded authority. That's been granted at the institution level, so NIH itself has expanded authority. It gives permission to allow for things like NCEs to be automatically granted, or what we like to call the freebie, around here, the one you can just get. All right. I don't see anything else. I'd like to thank you all for coming. We really appreciate it. And any questions that we didn't get to answer, we will try and reach out for folks, to folks to see if we can get information. There's ...

Anastasiya Hardison: I see a question I can answer really quickly in a minute. Is there a way to see a list of overdue reports for an institution? And, yes, in your signing official search, when you look for your RPPRs, you can look for the ones that are due. That is one of the search parameters.

Jade Blevins: Yes, that's actually, there's also the quick query by IPS that will show reports that will be due soon. Those don't do late ones. It just does the ones that are going to be due soon. And that one is available even without a login, so another good option. All right. Thank you all so much. We really appreciated having you all here.

Anastasiya Hardison: Thank you, everyone.