Minutes: May 24 Meeting of FDP/Federal eRA Forum

Participants:

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Welcome and Introductions

Dick Keogh started the meeting at 2:30 PM and welcomed everyone. This group grew out of a desire to have a forum where ideas could be shared for streamlining the grants process from the ERA perspective involving staff from the federal agencies, Grants.gov and FDP research institutions. This meeting is a continuation of

a dialogue that started with the meeting on March 25th. Although this group does not have a formal name, it is being organized as a subcommittee to the FDP ERA Standing Committee. Ron Splittgerber will be the University co-chair and there are discussions with Tony Cavataio, Department of Education, on being the federal agency co-chair. Tony also serves as the co-chair of the National Grants Partnership. Dick Keogh will be leaving Rhode Island College in June to work for InfoEd International. Nancy Wray, FDP Chair, indicated that a faculty member will also be asked to participate on the subcommittee, as will a representative from one of the new FDP Administrative Processes subcommittees. Nancy also indicated that it would be good to have an FDP emerging research institution member participate to get the perspective of a smaller institution.

Creation of a National User Profile Database

One of the topics for this group is the creation of a national user profile database to avoid the issue of researchers and principal investigators maintaining profiles in multiple databases in multiple agency systems. One of the issues raised at the last meeting was the issue of a common identifier for individuals.

Establishment of a common identifier; review of prior work done by Federal Commons developers and FDP

Jerry Stuck made a presentation based on requirements developed during the Federal Commons discussions. This information was based on documents developed in 1997-2000. The Federal Commons was looking for a single user credential that could be used to login to the Federal Commons portal. A primary use of the common identifier was to access principal investigator profile information stored in multiple agency databases through a single interface. The idea was to create a unique ID for people similar to the unique ID for organizations (DUNS number). Each agency currently uses different ways of identifying individuals in their internal profile systems. There are unique IDs internal to agency systems. Two requirements were addressed:
> 1) The SSN would not be used
> 2) Security staff recommended using 3 credential attributes (common identifier, user id and password).

The common identifier could be published in a public directory. The common identifier would be a self-selected ID, similar to how AOL assigns screen names. Some of the issues that were discussed:
> 1) multiple affiliations (appointments at multiple organizations)
> 2) unaffiliated individuals
> 3) a single profile database would have to be identified as a Privacy Act system of records and that one federal agency would have to take responsibility for Privacy Act issues.

Next Step for User Profile System

A question was raised whether the current Grants.gov credentials could be used to store demographic and possibly a unique identifier as part of the credential. The E-Authentication initiative is where the credentials are defined. There are currently 5 security levels for credentials. The way to go would be to work through a credential provider. Universities that are credential providers would allow users to use their university based credentials. The comment was made that the issue was not the credentials but the profile side. There could be a central database for profile

information and there may be additional information stored in agency databases. Another comment was that the credentials don't currently uniquely identify a person. You still need to come up with a unique ID. A comment was made that the common data elements for a profile database would need to be defined. The FDP through the work of a previous task force (Professional Profile) identified the list of data items for a person's profile. The ERA committee is reviewing these data requirements documents. At the time they were developed, the list reflected the requirements of the FDP universities and 10 federal agency members. The professional profile and organizational profile (also developed through an FDP task force) data requirements were incorporated into the EDI 194 transaction set. Steve Dowdy noted that one of the issues he is dealing with in the system to system interface is that his system must store individual IDs for each agency system in order to ensure that the key person data matches up when it reaches an agency. A unique ID would alleviate this problem.

The issue may not be the common identifier although you need to come to agreement on format and how it's created. The real issue may be where the profile resides and who is going to develop it. It would require an agency to host it or perhaps Grants.gov although in either case funding would be an issue. Grants.gov would also need approval by OMB to develop and host the system as a cross government project. Ownership of the profile system is important. It's not clear where it fits into the current cross government initiatives (Grants.gov, Line of Business). A profile system would support both apply (pre-award) and post award transactions. It would be helpful to know how individual agencies use this data today and what future applications might be developed. Regarding an agency to host a profile system, HHS would be a logical choice based on the number of profile records they have already. NSF would also be a potential site since many researchers get their first grant award from NSF. Ultimately, the profile system may belong in Grants.gov or Line of Business activities but in order to get it moving it would be necessary for an agency to step up and develop and host it. An example of a cross agency system developed for multiple agencies is the NIH iEdison system for invention disclosures.

The next step is to develop a white paper based on the information available today. The white paper in addition to describing the system requirements should include technology issues, potential uses of the system, cost projections and a proposed funding model. It was suggested that a small group (representing both federal and university representatives) be identified to develop the white paper.

DUNS/CCR Registration Issues

On the first day of the FDP meeting, Ellen Beck, UCLA, led a discussion on issues with using the Central Contractor Registry (CCR) and DUNS (Dun and Bradstreet Number) in grant applications. There is continual confusion with universities where individual universities have multiple DUNS numbers. No solutions were identified but there was a lot of frustration. Universities need to get a handle on the number of individual DUNS numbers and how this affects their CCR registration. Agency systems also validate the institution's DUNS numbers in their organizational databases. Agency systems have not cleaned up their organizational databases to tie to the institutional DUNS number registered with the CCR. Agencies should decide how they will use the CCR registration and DUNS number as a unique ID for an institution in their internal organizational data bases. Agencies do have the option of

downloading the CCR data and using that as their vendor (institution) file. This is how it's done in agency contracting systems. One problem may be that CCR is not as focused on the grants world. There is also the possibility that institutions may have multiple CCR registrations. Institutions are not sure who they can contact to discuss and/or correct this situation. As an example, an individual principal investigator can go to Dun and Bradstreet and get a DUNs number and then use that number to register with the CCR thus creating a potential duplicate registration for that institution. It was suggested that the CCR needs to do more validation to avoid multiple registrations for the same institution. This group should work with CCR to ensure that it reflects more closely the grants business process. When someone is authorized as the primary business contact, this is an all or nothing registration and that person is authorized for all transactions that use the CCR for registration. The CCR should recognize more business roles particularly for universities. CCR falls under the Integrated Acquisition, another E-Gov project, managed at the Government Services Administration (GSA). The CCR is evolving into the Business Partner Network (BPN) and Grants.gov has a seat on their functional requirements board. John Etcheverry represents Grants.gov on that board. Becky Spitzgo recommended that this group do some analysis to identify issues and recommendations that reflect the grants business process. Ellen Beck had already created an issues paper and will provide it to John Etcheverry so that he can discuss with CCR. Another suggestion was that agencies need to begin cleaning up their internal systems to reflect the single DUNS number in the CCR registration. Dealing with Dun and Bradstreet can also be a problem in trying to clean up the multiple numbers assigned to individual institutions. Institutions also need to do some training on campuses about the appropriate use of DUNS numbers. Becky Spitzgo suggested a Dun and Bradstreet contact (Charles Martin) who might be someone who could speak at a future FDP meeting. It might also be useful to invite a CCR representative to speak at the FDP meeting.

Grants.gov User Interface & Cross-platform compatibility

NIH has a pilot using a Citrix server to provide a PureEdge client for Mac users. Early testing has gone well. Grants.gov will look at the pilot and evaluate the costs. This may be a good solution until PureEdge develops a Mac client. The application package can be saved on the Mac after the PureEdge client is launched via the Citrix server. Grants.gov has a white paper describing how the Citrix server can be configured to use PureEdge. The NIH pilot was intended just for one solicitation (Pioneer awards) and as a proof of concept.

Grants.gov Change Management

There was a discussion on the best process for reporting changes to Grants.gov and understanding what items Grants.gov are working (known bugs, etc.) on and future plans. The help desk is not the best place to send these questions and comments. Steve Dowdy described how MIT uses a knowledgebase to document fixes and changes (driven by solutions reported to a help desk). This is more effective than the traditional FAQ document.

Next meeting: July 29nd was suggested as a date for the next meeting.