

Agency Application Submission Processing Panel Discussion

Panelists:

- **Bronda Harrison** - Environmental Protection Agency (EPA)
- **Vince Sprouls** – Department of Homeland Security
- **Paul Brundage** – National Aeronautics & Space Administration (NASA)
- **Jason Hitchcock** – United States Department of Agriculture/National Institute of Food and Agriculture (USDA/NIFA)
- **Sheri Cummins** – National Institutes of Health (NIH)
- **Erin Nielsen, Jeremy Leffler** – National Science Foundation (NSF)
- **Brad Stanford** – Office of Naval Research (ONR) & Department of Defense
- **Ed Calimag, Nicole Daniel** – Grants.gov

Moderators:

- **Ron Splittgerber** (Colorado State)
- **Roger Wood** (InfoEd)
- **Debbi Nixon** (Duke University)

Questions Posed to Agencies

- Adobe Forms & S2S submissions – any processing differences between them?
- Is direct submission to agency system supported?
- Are additional registrations required other than standard Grants.gov?
- How are Grants.gov submissions retrieved by your agency?
- How does data get into your Agency management system?
- What is your agency policy for handling catastrophic issues?
- Do you use Grants.gov's *Grace Period* (to allow application submission after closing date)?
- Do you push the deadline out to accommodate major issues?
- Does your agency send notifications to the PI and/or Institution?
- What is provided to agency reviewers – combined PDF, online view, etc.?
Can the PI see what the reviewers see?

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Adobe Forms & S2S submissions – any processing differences between them?

Agency	Response
AFOSR	N/A – our network protocol forbids S2S submissions
ARO	N/A – Do not use S2S
EPA	No
NASA	N/A – No S2S submission is used
NIFA	No – although we do encounter issues in processing S2S submissions as some packages come through Grants.gov missing information that we are expecting. Usually this causes a failure in the agency processing of these applications and requires technical assistance to get the applications inserted and processed in the NIFA backend systems.
NIH	No real difference in how NIH processes forms vs. S2S submissions. However, since the Adobe forms enforce some business rules not enforced by S2S (and vice versa), NIH ensures that all applications meet the full set of NIH business rules before an application image is generated. NIH also provides web services, an External User Acceptance Test (Ext-UAT) environment, test FOAs and documentation on NIH business rules as resources for S2S solution providers.

Adobe Forms & S2S submissions – any processing differences between them (cont.)?

Agency	Response
NSF	Additional checks applied to S2S (to enforce same rules as for Adobe forms submission)
ONR	N/A - Only S2S accepted
Grants.gov	

Is direct submission to agency system supported?

Agency	Response	What is the system?	Who has access?
AFOSR	Yes		Our international offices do not require that proposals be submitted through grants.gov. AFOSR Program Mgrs. can accept a proposal by email if all attempts at submitting through grants.gov fail.
ARO	N/A	N/A	N/A
EPA	No	N/A	N/A
NASA	Yes	NSPIRES	PI and Authorizing Official; team members and staff at submitting organization can be given all or partial access
NIFA	No	N/A	Note: Paper submission sometimes allowed in the event that NIFA is working with other agencies to fund projects. In these cases application is submitted to Grants.gov, but through the other agency.
NIH	No	N/A	All electronic competing applications (including those prepared/submitted via ASSIST) go through Grants.gov
NSF	Yes	FastLane & Research.gov	PI and SPOs (AORs)
ONR	No	N/A	N/A

Are additional registrations required other than standard Grants.gov?

Agency	Response	If so, what are they?
AFOSR	No	
ARO	N/A	N/A
EPA	No	
NASA	Yes	Organizations must be registered in NSPIRES (using SAM information); Individuals must also be registered in NSPIRES
NIFA	No	
NIH	Yes	Organizations must be registered in eRA Commons and eRA Commons accounts for the PD/PI(s) and any project leads on a component of a multi-project application must be included in the application.
NSF	No	
ONR	No	
Grants.gov	N/A	

How are Grants.gov submissions retrieved by your agency?

Agency	How often are submissions retrieved?	Is retrieval ongoing or only at deadline times?	What is retrieved? XML? Generated PDF pages? Both?	How is it retrieved?
AFOSR	No set schedule	Done on a daily/weekly schedule	XML package	Proposals are manually downloaded to our local network drives
ARO	Throughout the day, but no designated time	Ongoing	Both	Automated process invoked manually on a daily basis by designated individuals
EPA	Frequently	Ongoing	Package containing both PDF and XML files is made available in the Agency's grant management system	Automatic retrieval by an agency system

How are Grants.gov submissions retrieved by your agency (cont.)?

Agency	How often are submissions retrieved?	Is retrieval ongoing or only at deadline times?	What is retrieved? XML? Generated PDF pages? Both?	How is it retrieved?
NASA	As submitted	Ongoing; but tends to happen around deadlines (agency rep forwards mail to SRESS contractor when notified of a submission)	XML file is provided by Grants.gov, but NASA uses the PDF files	Uses online 'retrieve submitted proposals' tool
NIFA	Every 15 minutes		The manifest, XML and PDF documents	

How are Grants.gov submissions retrieved by your agency (cont.)?

Agency	How often are submissions retrieved?	Is retrieval ongoing or only at deadline times?	What is retrieved? XML? Generated PDF pages? Both?	How is it retrieved?
NIH	Constantly polls	Ongoing	XML and PDF attachments. With the move to FORMS-C, NIH no longer relies on GG's completed form PDFs when assembling application image.	
NSF	Every 2 hours between 5:50 AM & 11:50 PM	Ongoing, including weekends and holidays	Application zip files, which include XML and PDF attachments	Uses Agency S2S web service
ONR	Once an hour, 24 hours a day	Ongoing	Both	Through ONR's eProposal System

How does data get into your Agency management system?

Agency	Automatic or manual import of Grants.gov data?	Is there a way to view the application once the data has been loaded into your system?
AFOSR	Manually enter data into our Awards Management System	
ARO	Both manual and XML data received with the submission. Submissions are processed as they are made available by Grants.gov	No
EPA	Automatic process using 3 agency systems: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Data is first imported into the CDX system - Then it is automatically transferred to EPA's grants management system (manual verification that application has transferred) - Data is then downloaded into the review management database (with manual verification of the data) and files are retrieved for preparing CDs for the review 	No, only as imported from Grants.gov

How does data get into your Agency management system (cont.)?

Agency	Automatic or manual import of Grants.gov data?	Is there a way to view the application once the data has been loaded into your system?
NASA	Manual import - Some data from Grants.gov forms is key stroked into NSPIRES (e.g., the Grants.gov forms); other parts are assembled into a single PDF and then 'uploaded'	Yes – available for viewing in NSPIRES by PI and AOR; internal NSPIRES users can also see submitted proposal
NIFA	Automatically downloaded – only time they're manually retrieved is if there is an issue with pulling the data using the automatic process: <ul style="list-style-type: none">- XML is used to pull data that is inserted into the backend system- Manual data entry is only done if application information is incorrect- PDF documents are used to build a consolidated package that is used by backend systems to view the application for review	

How does data get into your Agency management system (cont.)?

Agency	Automatic or manual import of Grants.gov data?	Is there a way to view the application once the data has been loaded into your system?
NIH	All supplied data is captured and retained in the assembled application image. In addition, NIH automatically maps needed discrete data from the XML into eRA systems.	Upon acceptance of an error-free application, eRA systems assemble an application image including bookmarks, table of contents, headers and footers. Cover Letters and Appendices remain separate from the application image. Applicants have a two business day 'application viewing window' to log into eRA Commons and confirm that the application image correctly reflects their submission or (if before the deadline) make corrective submissions. After the application viewing window the image remains available, but applicants can no longer reject and correct the application.

How does data get into your Agency management system (cont.)?

Agency	Automatic or manual import of Grants.gov data?	Is there a way to view the application once the data has been loaded into your system?
NSF	Automatically imported using an automated system which processes Grants.gov/ Research.gov submissions and inserts them into FastLane	Yes – available for viewing in FastLane once it has been processed and successfully accepted
ONR	Automatically imported XML using ONR's eProposal System	No (not outside of ONR)
Grants.gov		

What is your agency policy for handling catastrophic issues?

Agency	Response
AFOSR	Determined on a case-by-case basis; generally if there is an IT failure or a natural disaster we extend the deadline.
ARO	Generally, the deadline is rigidly enforced and late submissions are accepted only after it is determined by Acquisitions that an effort (i.e., clicking the submit button on the form) was made to submit by the deadline.
EPA	Determined based on individual situation – will push deadline out to accommodate major issues
NASA	Regional events (e.g., power outages, storms) can result in a solicitation amendment that pushes out the due date for all proposers.
NIFA	NIFA typically will extend the deadline depending on the perceived length of the issue and that would coincide with how close we are to the application deadline.

What is your agency policy for handling catastrophic issues (cont.)?

Agency	Response
NIH	For 'catastrophic' issues (e.g., Grants.gov or eRA Commons down all day on a due date), deadlines may be pushed out (applications can still be submitted through Grants.gov using the grace period). Changes in deadlines are typically communicated through the NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts and listservs . Otherwise, system issues are handled on a case-by-case basis. See NIH System Issue Policy: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/ElectronicReceipt/support.htm#guidelines . Applicants must contact the eRA Commons Help Desk by the due date and document any system issue outside their control.
NSF	In the case of a natural or anthropogenic disaster, NSF leaves this decision up to the cognizant program office. Submitters would need to contact the program to receive approval to submit a late proposal. In the case of the government shutdown, NSF identified the programs that would receive extensions to their deadlines.
ONR	Depends on the circumstances
Grants.gov	

Do you use Grants.gov's *Grace Period* (to allow application submission after closing date)?

Agency	Response
AFOSR	
ARO	No
EPA	No
NASA	Yes - a 28-day "late proposal period" is standard, but rarely used as there is a high bar for acceptance of a late proposal.
NIFA	Yes - use the grace period with typical standard of 30 days for most submissions. The 30 day grace is mostly followed for competitive submissions where adherence to a deadline is more critical. May add additional grace periods of 60, 90 or 120 days if the applications do not have a strongly adhered to deadline. Our reliance on the grace period is usually to help applicants who are having technical issues and is not generally extended.
NIH	Yes - typically provide 30 day grace period for each FOA. During the grace period applications will get through Grants.gov and NIH systems, however, they are accepted at discretion of NIH staff. NIH Late Policy: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-11-035.html .
NSF	Yes - NSF will use Grants.gov's grace period, but only as it pertains to NSF's policy for handling catastrophic issues.
ONR	No

Do you push the deadline out to accommodate major issues?

Agency	Response
AFOSR	Determined on a case-by-case basis; generally if there is an IT failure or a natural disaster we extend the deadline. Human failure typically does not result in a deadline extension.
ARO	No
EPA	Yes, based on the individual situation.
NASA	Yes, regional events (e.g., power outages, storms) can result in a solicitation amendment that pushes out the due date for all proposers.
NIFA	In the event of catastrophic issues the agency typically will extend the deadline depending on the perceived length of the issue and that would coincide with how close we are to the application deadline.
NIH	Sometimes. Decision made on case-by-case basis.
NSF	In the case of a natural or anthropogenic disaster, NSF leaves this decision up to the cognizant program office. Submitters would need to contact the program to receive approval to submit a late proposal. In the case of the government shutdown, NSF identified the programs that would receive extensions to their deadlines.
ONR	Depends on the circumstances.
Grants.gov	

Does your agency send notifications to the PI and/or Institution?

Agency	Response	Who is notified?	What notifications are sent?
AFOSR	Yes		Send out an auto-generated email acknowledging receipt of the proposal using contact details provided on the proposal face page and provide contact details for the AFOSR Program Manager
ARO	Yes	PI and Admin Rep indicated on the submission using XML data received with the submission	Notifications sent upon receipt, upon verification , when assigned for review and upon rejection or acceptance for funding
EPA	Yes	POC and Authorized Rep on the 424 (cover page)	Upon manual verification of eligibility, extensive information regarding notification of application receipt is available in each announcement. A declination letter/request for past performance history is sent to PI along with results from external review panel. Add'l declinations are also sent upon determination that an award will not be made. Declinations are also sent to admin contacts.

Does your agency send notifications to the PI and/or Institution (cont.)?

Agency	Response	Who is notified?	What notifications are sent?
NASA	Yes	PI and the AOR(s) using email addresses provided in the PI and AOR NSPIRES record	Both are automatically notified once the proposal is "submitted" into NSPIRES. Notification is again sent when decisions are made about selection/non-selection.
NIFA	Yes	PI and AOR as listed on the 424 Cover Page	NIFA sends a final notification when the application has cleared the initial review for compliance. NIFA also sends out a notification if the application does not pass the initial review.
NIH	Yes	Contact Person, PD/PI, and AOR, as identified on the SF424 (R&R) cover form (and using those email addresses).	Notifications are sent throughout the application/grant process. Information about the notifications sent as part of the submission process can be found at: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/ElectronicReceipt/email_notifications.htm#grants .

Does your agency send notifications to the PI and/or Institution (cont.)?

Agency	Response	Who is notified?	What notifications are sent?
NSF	Yes	Communication is sent directly to the PI and AOR listed on the application. NSF does not use stored profile data to send the communication.	NSF sends an acceptance or rejection e-mail to the PI and AOR when the application is processed.
ONR	Yes	PI and admin POC using face page information	Notifications are sent upon rejection, upon hold pending final decision, and upon recommendation for funding.
Grants.gov			

What is provided to agency reviewers – combined PDF, online view, etc.? Can the PI see what the reviewers see?

Agency	What do agency reviewers see?	Can PI see reviewer materials?
AFOSR	Grants.gov submission is compiled into a single PDF document that is subsequently sent out for peer review.	No
ARO	PDFs are combined in a specific order, the file is bookmarked, the locally generated cover sheet inserted, and the file is stored in EDMS. Reviewers access the application online via Extranet. PDF files are used to handle exceptions when evaluators have problems.	No
EPA	Combined and bookmarked PDF on CD.	No - Not automatically and, to the best of my knowledge, we've never had a request. While we could theoretically share the file, the cost (since it would be done manually), our policy of not allowing revisions at this stage, and that we collate the file in a consistent manner results in doing so being of limited value.

What is provided to agency reviewers – combined PDF, online view, etc.? Can the PI see what the reviewers see? (cont.)

Agency	What do agency reviewers see?	Can PI see reviewer materials?
NASA	Reviewers are provided with a PDF file that combines the 'cover page' information (key-stroked part of submission) and the uploaded PDF file.	Yes - PI/AOR can see 'combined' PDF file.
NIFA	We combine all the files into one large document. We stitch them together and create a bookmarked version that is easier for internal review. The typical mode of review uses the agency Peer Review System which is an online accessible way to review the files. These files are displayed as PDF only. In some cases applications are burned to CD and sent to reviewers, but this is not done much anymore. Printed copies are not typically made for reviewers outside the agency, but we may make printed copies for review panels held at the agency.	No - Currently the agency does not offer this option.

What is provided to agency reviewers – combined PDF, online view, etc.? Can the PI see what the reviewers see? (cont.)

Agency	What do agency reviewers see?	Can PI see reviewer materials?
NIH		Yes - The assembled application image is available in eRA Commons exactly as a reviewer sees it. Applicants preparing multi-project applications to NIH using ASSIST can also preview the application image prior to submission.
NSF	NSF provides a PDF view of the proposal to reviewers. Information is provided as a PDF to both panelists and ad hoc reviewers, so they see what proposers have submitted. Reviewers will receive most of the info submitted as a part of the proposal. However, single copy documents are not seen by reviewers (i.e. proprietary/privileged information, reviewers to include/not include).	
ONR	Grants.gov forms and all attachments.	No