

Basic Assistance Task Group
Minutes for Meeting on May 23, 2005

1) Walter Schaffer from the National Institutes of Health presented the results of the yearlong review of the modular grants process. His presentation was entitled Outcome Study for the Evaluation of the Modular Grants Program. The full set of his slides is available as a pdf document at:

http://thefdp.org/Meeting_May2005.html

The original goals of the NIH modular application process were to:

- Focus efforts of the peer reviewers, principal investigators, institutional officials, and NIH staff on the science of the applications (rather than on the itemized budget);
- Reduce administrative burden for all stakeholders and simplify the grant administration process; and
- Accommodate principal investigators need for flexibility.

The purposes of the review were to:

- Determine if the modular grant application process met its intended long-term program goals as first described in 1998; and
- Determine if stakeholders understand the modular grant application process.

The data presented by Dr. Schaffer suggest that the modular process met its original goals, the stakeholders understand the process, and all stakeholders are satisfied with the process (with investigators and institutional officials registering higher levels of enthusiasm than NIH staff).

Perhaps the most important data were responses to the question whether scientific merit of a modular application could be assessed (i.e., without the detailed budget). 87% of peer reviewers surveyed and 79% of scientific review administrators (NIH scientific employees that staff and manage the peer review process) agreed. This helps address the key issue of whether detailed budgets are necessary for at least a subset of the NIH grant application program.

These data were still being analyzed by at the time of the presentation, so official reactions from NIH staff and potential changes in the process were not yet available.

2) The Las Vegas BAG session closed with a recommendation that the group better define statements of desired outcomes and evaluation criteria for budget streamlining pilots. Susan Ross presented a draft statement of objectives and options and led a discussion. The final version of the statement entitled Budget Streamlining: Objectives and Options is appended.

3) Jim Randolph led a brief discussion of potential follow-up to the Documentation and Allocation Standard presentation at the January meeting in Las Vegas. (available for download from http://thefdp.org/Meeting_Jan2005.html)

It is believed that few grantee institutions are using this project-relatedness flexibility. Jim proposed a survey of all FDP administrative representatives to determine which institutions did implement the process and what investigators and administrators perceived the benefits to be. Highlights of the active programs (if permitted) could be assembled and distributed as a potential best practice guide to other grantee institutions. Charlie Kaars and John Michnowicz will assist in designing the survey (and seek Executive Committee approval).

4) Post-meeting note: Randolph and Kaars will draft an official request from the task group to Tom Weber requesting that the National Science Foundation develop a pilot of a grant competition that involves little or no budget detail at the point of submission.