

Basic Assistance Task Group
Minutes for Meeting on September 20, 2004

Nancy Wray, Task Group co-facilitator (Dartmouth College) opened the meeting. She referred the group to the document prepared by the Basic Assistance Subcommittee on reducing Administrative Burden of Pre-Award Detailed Budget Preparation (copy was included in the FDP meeting book).

The document provided a preliminary outline of two proposed demonstrations; one aimed at involving other Federal agencies in pilots of the modular application process currently in use at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and the other aimed at increasing the use of the modular process by the NIH by raising the current threshold (now used for applications proposing no more than \$250,000 in direct costs per year).

Joe Ellis from the NIH Office of Policy for Extramural Research Administration (OPERA) suggested against promoting expansion within NIH at this time for two reasons:

- NIH is expecting relatively flat appropriations for the next several years and past experience has shown that the modular process tends to increase the size of the applications (and presumably, the resulting awards).
- The results of the Westat review of the modular process ought to be delivered to NIH early in calendar 2005.

For both these reasons, Joe thought it wise to delay approaching NIH about expansion.

Further discussion by the group lead to a consensus to defer that proposal.

Nancy Wray then initiated discussion of the second proposal – expansion to other agencies. Resulting discussion issues included:

Demonstration make-up: One option is to include FDP member institutions only, perhaps requiring them to pledge elimination of internal budget requirements prior to modular proposal submission. This would have the benefit of testing the hypothesis that PI and administrator time can be saved by using modular process, with little or not loss in budget integrity.

Concerns might present given that peer reviewers would then have two different types of applications (modular and non-modular) to review in parallel. Individual investigators perhaps might be hesitant to participate in demonstration fearing bias against new budget format.

Another option is to open the pilot up to all applicants, FDP member or otherwise, in much the same manner NIH used in its introduction of the modular process. This perhaps leads to a better experiment from the agency perspective but

eliminates the possibility of requiring participants to eliminate pre-submission detailed budgets.

No consensus was reached.

Demonstration specifics: Module size? The average grant size of the participating federal agency should dictate the size of the modules (i.e., something other than \$25,000). Evaluation criteria? Either need to develop our own or borrow from the Westat survey.

The sentiment was that many of these issues necessarily could be considered only after a specific Federal agency has presented as a participant. Some Federal representatives expressed concern about the modular approach, indicating a desire to see budget detail.

Principle next steps – 1) Subcommittee to continue to develop the demonstration proposal, in part to better define the specific goals of a demonstration; 2) Continue discussions with agency partners to identify a potential participant in the demonstration; 3) Jim Randolph will contact Dr. Anthony Demsey at NIH to check on status of the Westat review, in part to determine whether the results will be available for the January FDP meeting.