8 Step to Submitting Using ASSIST Transcript

Introduction

Welcome to this video tutorial on submitting an NIH Grant Application using eRA's ASSIST system. This video demonstrates key processes such as finding opportunities, initiating applications, managing team access for a successful submission, and tracking submission status.

There are eight steps to submitting an NIH grant application using ASSIST.

1. Find an opportunity,
2. make a submission plan,
3. initiate your application,
4. provide application access to appropriate team members,
5. enter your application data,
6. finalize your application and prepare for submission,
7. submit your application,
8. and finally track your application status through to eRA Commons. Let's look at each step one-by-one.

Find a Funding Opportunity

Step 1: Find an opportunity of interest. All NIH notices of funding opportunity announcements, often referred to as NOFOs, are posted on Grants.gov. Grants.gov is the single official source for NIH grant opportunities. You can use Grants.gov Subscriptions for notifications of new opportunities.

Grants.gov has a robust search capability to help you quickly identify any opportunities in your area. Once you've found an interesting opportunity, read the entire text to understand all requirements and to determine if it is a good fit for your proposed project. For NIH opportunities, at the bottom of the page in the Documents section you find a link that takes you to the full notice.

A quick look at the table of contents shows the announcement contains a lot of important information. For the purposes of preparing and submitting your application, pay special attention to Section IV. Application and Submission Information.

This section includes any NOFO-specific information that would be different from the standard application guide instructions.

In the section above the table of contents is a link to our application guide – which is actually a website. On the How to Apply – Application Guide website you'll find general application processing information, including guidance on registration, formatting application attachments, rules for text fields, page limits, submission policies, and dealing with system issues. Form-by-form, field-by-field application instructions are essential for preparing a successful application.

There are also numerous resources on the page such as Annotated Form Sets, Standard Due Dates, and more, as well as links to associated systems such as ASSIST and eRA Commons.

Plan

Step 2 is to make a submission plan. Verify all registrations are in place and active, including your organization's System for Award Management or SAM credentials which require annual renewal. Identify team members and make sure everyone is aware of their roles, responsibilities and timelines.

The third step is to login to ASSIST and initiate your application.

Initiate

In your NOFO, right above the Table of Contents, you'll find an Apply Online Using ASSIST button. Clicking this button takes you to ASSIST. Login using the appropriate credentials.

The ASSIST welcome screen has two sections: Grants, Cooperative Agreements, and Other Transactions. There is also the Loan Repayment Programs section.

In the first section, you can Search for in-progress applications, or you can initiate an application. To initiate an application, enter a valid NOFO number in the Opportunity Number and click Go.

On the Initiate Application screen, provide the requested items, including project title, organization, and PD/PI information. Then click the Initiate Application button at the bottom of the screen.

Once using ASSIST, status messages, like the Application Saved message seen here upon initiation, are displayed at the top of the screen. Use the tabs across the screen to navigate between forms to do your data entry. Available ASSIST actions appear on the left.

Just below the screen name we provide tips and handy information, so pay attention to any text you see in that area. And, the orange question marks you see on the screens bring you to the online help for using ASSIST.

Step 4 is to build your team. You already identified team members while planning in Step 2.

Build Team

In this step you need to gather the eRA Commons usernames for anyone who will be working in ASSIST. And ensure everyone who needs access to the application has it. ASSIST automatically provides application access to certain users.

Anyone who logs into ASSIST with an eRA Commons account that has a Signing Official or Administrative Official role has edit access to any ASSIST applications for their organization.

The Project Directors/Principal Investigators for the application have edit access once you've edited the Sr/Key Person profile form to include their eRA Commons credentials and select the PD/PI role. The person who initiated the application also has edit access.

Signing Officials can add additional team members using the Manage Access action found in the left navigation pane. They can change the current access privileges for a user. Or add additional users.

Providing an eRA Commons Username and clicking Search allows the Signing Official to control their access level privileges, delegate the ability to manage access, and delegate the ability to change application status.

When the appropriate users have been added, click the RETURN TO APPLICATION button under the Actions options in the left side column.

Step 5 is data entry. The form navigation tabs provide access to the data entry screens.

Enter Data

Only one user can edit any particular form in the application at a time. At the top of each screen is an Edit button which allows you to enter data for the chosen form. It also locks the form. Other users can view the form but can't edit the form until the Lock is released.

There are multiple Save buttons at the bottom of each data entry screen. Save and Keep Lock saves your data and continues to block other users from editing the form. While, Save and Release Lock saves your data, but allows other users to access and edit the form.

When you initiate your application, you may not see all the forms you need in the navigation. For example, if working on an R01 application you may need to add the appropriate budget form. Or, you may want to add an Assignment Request Form to provide a preference for an institute or study section. The Add Optional Form action provides a list of additional forms available in the opportunity's application package.

Select a form in the dropdown list, click Submit, and the form will then show in the navigation.

Complete your application forms following all guidance in the application guide, the funding opportunity, and in notices published on the NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts web page.

Note that when instructions in the application guide and the NOFO conflict, the NOFO wins. And, when instructions in the NOFO and a notice conflict, the notice wins. Once you have completed the forms, use the Validate Application action to check your application data against NIH business rules to identify errors and warnings.

You must to correct all errors prior to submission. In fact, ASSIST you cannot submit until all errors are cleared. Review all identified warnings, and based on your circumstances, decide if any action needs to be taken. Warnings do not prevent application submission, but they're there for a reason. So, take the time to consider them.

Step 6 is to finalize your application and prepare for submission by previewing your application and updating the submission status to Ready for Submission.

Finalize

The Preview Application action is available in the left column when the Summary tab is selected.

The first time you preview the application it shows a message that there is nothing found to display. Click the Generate Preview button to initiate the preview.

The Preview Application screen updates to show who generated the preview, when it was generated and the status. In this case, the status is Waiting to process. Give the system a few seconds to create the preview, and then click the Refresh Status button.

The Preview Application screen updates again, and now shows the status of Preview Available, and it includes an action button, View, which downloads the PDF version of the application.

After the initial preview, to see the application again, you have two options. You can view the last generated preview by clicking View. Or, you can generate a new preview. The preview is exactly how your application would be assembled upon submission, except for a few items in the footer like the Grants.gov tracking number and submission timestamp.

The application image does not include your cover letter, PHS Assignment Request Form, or appendix information. Those documents are managed separately from the application image provided to reviewers.

When you are doing data entry, your application is in a Work in Progress status. Before you can submit, you must update the status to Ready for Submission.

Clicking the Update Submission Status link displays a popup where you can select from a drop-down menu of available statuses and enter any comments you want to add to the status history. With a comment added, click the Add comment button to update the submission status.

If you want to skip the comment option, click the “or continue without adding a comment” linked text to submit the change of submission status.

Before an application is changed to Ready for Submission status, ASSIST runs a final validation check against your application.

At this point, you should have already used the Validate Application option to identify errors and address any issues that were identified. But, if you didn’t, you’ll be instructed to do so at this step.

When no errors are found, the status is updated to Ready for Submission. If warnings are found, you are given the opportunity to address them, or you click Ready for Submission to change the submission status.

Step 7 is submitting your application. Your error-free application must be submitted by 5 pm local time on the due date to be considered on time.

Submit

Please submit early to allow time to address any unforeseen issues. And, by early we mean submitting days, not hours or minutes, before the deadline.

You must be signed into ASSIST with a Signing Official eRA Commons account to submit the application, and your application must be in the Ready for Submission status. If those criteria are met, the Submit button is active.

Depending on the scenario, you may be prompted with a Notice window, in this case, confirming the correct forms were used for the application. The forms package are the specific forms used to prepare an NIH application. These forms are updated on a regular basis in response to policy updates. Thus, you may see a more recent form set listed on a NOFO. To continue, click the Submit button. Or if you need to, you can stop the submission action by clicking the Cancel button.

Applications are submitted from ASSIST to Grants.gov. After hitting Submit, you're prompted for Grants.gov Authorized Organization Representative or AOR credentials. AOR's have signature authority in Grants.gov, like Signing Officials do in eRA Commons. Just two systems with different names for that authority.

The AOR credentials are passed on to Grants.gov and, if everything checks out, your application is sent. A message to that effect appears at the top of the screen and the application status changes to Submitted.

Track

The eighth, and final step in this process, is to track your submission. Our eRA systems are constantly polling Grants.gov to process submitted applications.

All the application forms and attachments are assembled into an application image, in PDF format, complete with headers, footers, a table of contents, and bookmarks. This assembled application image is posted in the PD/PI's eRA Commons account.

And, along the way, we send multiple notifications to the email addresses listed on the SF424 R&R form.

On the Summary tab, right next to the Submitted status, is a View Submission Status Details link. That link brings you to the Status Information screen. Use the Check for Status Updates button to refresh the displayed status.

You see the status for ASSIST, Grants.gov and NIH. It takes anywhere between a few minutes and a few hours to process your application, so you may need to refresh the status a few times before all the information is available.

What you really want to see is the seven-digit agency tracking number which indicates the processing is complete and an application image is posted.

The Agency Tracking number links you directly to the eRA Commons Status Information screen for your application. In the Other Relevant Documents section, you'll find important documents related to your submission, such as your eApplication, cover letter, PHS Assignment request form and appendices.

The eApplication is the assembled application image reviewers and staff will see - check it carefully. You have a two-business day viewing window to check your application before it automatically moves forward to NIH staff for further processing.

Within that window, a Signing Official can Reject the application in eRA Commons. But any subsequent corrective submissions must be made before the submission deadline.

Viewing your final assembled application image in eRA Commons is the most important step in the process.

Even if you Previewed the Application prior to submission, check it again. It is your responsibility to notify the eRA Service Desk, within the two-business day viewing window, of any assembly issues.

Understand, if you can't view it, we can't review it!

That completes the eight steps of the submission process.

There are several resources available to you should you need them to help you with the ASSIST submission option.

- ASSIST Online Help
  https://www.era.nih.gov/erahelp/ASSIST/default.htm
- Overview of ASSIST
  https://www.era.nih.gov/help-tutorials/assist/overview.htm
- ASSIST Training Materials
  https://www.era.nih.gov/help-tutorials/assist/era-training-assist.htm
- If you need additional help, please contact the eRA Service Desk
  https://www.era.nih.gov/need-help

This concludes this video tutorial on submitting an NIH Grant Application using eRA's ASSIST system. Thank You for watching.