Building a NIH Multi-Project Application Using ASSIST Transcript

Welcome to this video tutorial on building a NIH multi-project application using eRA's ASSIST. The tutorial focuses on the mechanics of building out a multi-project application. It assumes that participating organizations and key personnel have been identified.

For more information on using ASSIST and understanding the structure of NIH multi-project applications, see the other tutorials in this series.

A multi-project application is a single grant application submission with multiple, interrelated components with defined work, personnel, sites and budgets that share a common focus or objective.

Initiate a Multi-Project Application

First find an NIH multi-project application from Grants.gov. Navigate to the full Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO) document and review the information to ensure that the opportunity aligns with your project goals. Make sure to take note of the opportunity number as you need this to initiate the application.

Near the beginning of the NOFO, you find an "NIH ASSIST system" link. Click the link and log in with your eRA Commons credentials.

This opens the welcome page to ASSIST. In the Initiate Application field, type in the opportunity number for the NOFO you wish to apply to. Click Go.

Depending on the scenario, you may need to select a Form Package. 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. Typically, the one with the latest closing date is the package you want to select. If you have questions, contact the eRA Service Desk.

On the Initiate Application screen add the Application Project Title. In this case, a signing official initiated the application, so many of the fields are pre-filled. In the Contact Project Director/Principal Investigator section, you can use the Pre-Fill Application from Username button to complete the fields. When done, click Initiate Application.

The screen refreshes and presents the Application Information screen. You want to make note of the Application ID, as this is the easiest way to pull up the application later as you work to complete all the components.

Every multi-project application starts with the Overall Component, which is created automatically when the application is initiated. From the left side navigation pane, under Component Type click the plus side next to Overall and from the menu, click Overall. The screen updates again showing the Overall Component screen with the required forms identified by tabs across the top.

Create Other Components

The NOFO outlines the types and the required minimum and/or maximum number of components expected. And because the required components are defined by the opportunity, they vary from one opportunity to another. You find the scope of the components defined in Section 4. Application and Submission Information in the NOFO.

Other than the Overall Component, which is required, there are a number of other types of components available. In this example, in addition to the Overall component, an Administrative Core is required, Cores are optional, and at least 3 projects are required. And note that there isn't an upper limit for the number of projects that can be included in the application.

To create additional components, click Add New Component in the left side navigation pane. This opens the Add Component screen. Select the Component type, in this case, Admin Core and complete the required field for Start and End Dates, and the component title.

Note: It is helpful to add a Component Short Name using a naming structure such as Component Type followed by a three-digit sequential number, and or, an abbreviation to indicate the organization responsible for the component. In this case, Admin-Core-VSA. This helps you visualize the structure of the application.

Repeat this process, building out the shell of the complete application. Add the Core components as desired. Then add the Project components. In this case, 3 projects are required. When you are done, you see all the components listed on the left side navigation pane, under Component Type.

Provide Team Access

With the components created, you can now assign access to the application to the people who are to participate in the program. ASSIST automatically provides access for some users based on roles assigned to them in eRA Commons.

Signing officials (SOs) and administrative officials (AOs) of the applicant organization have edit access for the entire application. While SOs and AOs at participating organizations have edit access to their components.

Access is also granted based on a person's role in the application. The person who initiates the application has edit access for the entire application. Program Directors and Principal Investigators (PD/PIs) listed in the Overall Component have edit access for the entire application. For other component types, a person assigned as Project Lead has edit access for their individual components.

The Project Lead role is assigned on the Senior/Key Person Profile form for each component type. When you click on the Senior/Key Person Profile tab you see two sections. Project Lead and Senior/Key Person(s). To add the Project Lead, click Edit.

In the Edit mode, the screen expands to show all the editable fields. Required fields are identified by a red asterisk at the beginning of the field name. You must complete at least the required fields to avoid getting a validation error when the form is saved.

Access to various components of the application can be given to any user with an eRA Commons account. The level of access is defined using the Mange Access action. Click Manage Access in the left navigation pane. The User Access Summary form opens.

It shows the PD/PIs from the Overall Component and the Project Leads from the other components. Because the roles are assigned to them in the application, their access permissions are already set.

To provide access to other users, click Add User. This opens the Add New User screen. To add a person, type their eRA Commons username in the Username field, then click Search.

With the user found, their name is displayed at the top and you can define their level of access. Access to the application can be limited in the following manner. You can provide access to the entire application or just specific components. Components can be set to View or Edit and form access can be restricted to only budget forms or to just non-budget forms, or access can be granted to all forms for the component.

When all the access options are configured, click Save. The User Access Summary screen reloads, showing the newly added user in the table. You can modify a user's access by clicking on their username. This opens the User Access Detail screen where additional access can be granted, or modified, or all access can be revoked.

Adding Optional Forms

Once you initiate your application all the standard forms required for each component are shown as tabs across the top of the screen. However, you may need to add additional forms in order to submit a complete application.

While the term “optional” is used, it refers to different forms that may be required based on the criteria of the opportunity, and some that may actually be optional such as the Assignment Request Form. The specific information is spelled out in the Notice of Funding Opportunity, in Section IV: Application and Submission Information.

Whatever form you need, consult the application guide to determine the appropriate form. To add the form, go to the component that needs the form, and click the Add Optional Form button.

This opens a window with a drop-down menu customized to the particular opportunity and component type, showing only the forms available for this opportunity.

Select the form you want. In this case, the Assignment Request Form, then Hit submit. It'll be added to the tabbed navigation on the Application Information screen. Repeat this process for all the additional forms needed to complete your application.

Data Entry Check

ASSIST checks entered data when the form is saved. For data forms you typically have 2 or three save options. When a form is put into Edit mode, it locks the form, keeping anyone else from making edits to the form.

The Save and Keep Lock button saves the data, does the validation checks, but keeps the form in Edit mode. If there are errors, you see a linked message about each error. Click on the link to be taken to that field or scroll down until you see the error, which is identified by a red box and a note about the error.

For the Save and Release Lock and Save and Add buttons, ASSIST provides a warning message in a pop-up window for errors. The message provides the option to go back to fix the errors or save the form with the errors. If you go back to fix the errors, you can click on the links or scroll down to the fields with errors.

It is important to note that this is a data entry level check. It checks things like attachment format, and that required fields are completed, etc.. It does not check business rules. This means that some errors may still exist that are not caught by this check.

Component Validation

It is also possible to complete a component validation check. This helps to quickly identify what forms of the component need attention in order to be completed. Click the Validate Component button in the left navigation pane.

The system runs the checks and displays the Component Errors and Warnings Results screen. It is important to remember that Errors stop the application from being submitted so they must be addressed before submission. Warnings do not hinder the submission. However, warnings should be fixed at your discretion. Read through the warnings and determine if they need to be addressed and that you can address them before the submission deadline.

Preview and Update Component Status

With the errors identified, they can be fixed. The validation process is repeated for all the components. However, at any time during the process you can review what the component looks like when it is submitted for review. From the left navigation pane, click Preview Current Component.

This generates a PDF document of the component. The preview is exactly how your component is assembled upon submission, except for a few items in the footer like the Grants.gov tracking number and submission timestamp.

Once a component is validated as error free for the data entry level checks, you update the status of the component. By default, the status of a component is Work in Progress as displayed on the Summary Tab. To change the status go to the left navigation pane, click the Update Component Status button.

This opens the Update Component Status window. From the Select Status drop-down menu, your options are Final, Complete, and Abandoned. Complete indicates that data entry is finished and it is ready for review by the applicant organization. Final is set by the applicant organization once the review is complete, and the application is ready for submission.

The Abandoned status is available for all components except the Overall Component. The Abandoned status indicates that the component is no longer being worked on. Since the Overall Component is required, it cannot be abandoned or deleted. In this case, the status is being set to Complete.

The Update Component Status window provides a text box where you can make notes and comments that are added to the status history. You then click the Add comment button to change the status. Or if you prefer not to leave a comment, you can click the ‘continue without adding a comment' text. The screen refreshes to show the component summary tab, a message at the top shows the status has been updated and the status reads Complete.

A summary of the status of each component can be found by clicking the Display Component Status button in the left navigation pane.

Submitting the Multi-Project Application

To submit the Multi-Project Application, at least one component must have a status of Final. Of course, best practice is to have all components reviewed and set to final by the applicant organization.

Before the application can be submitted, the status of the application must be set to All Components Final. From the Application Information screen, click Update Submission Status. This opens the Update Submission Status window. From the Select Status menu, select All Components Final. This is like changing the status of an individual component, you can choose to include a comment and click Add comment or click continue with adding a comment to change the status.

You see the status is now set as All Components Final. The next step must be completed by a signing official. Before the application can be submitted to Grants.gov and then to NIH, the SO must set the status to Ready for Submission.

The SO logs into ASSIST, finds the appropriate application, and clicks the Update Submission Status button. Like the other change of status options, the SO selects the Ready for Submission option from the drop-down menu and can opt to leave a comment or not.

When the status change is initiated, ASSIST reviews all the components for errors. If additional errors are found, you set the application status back to Work in Progress, as well as any components that need corrections. After the errors have been addressed, set all the statuses of the components back to Final.

Then, as before, set the application status to All Components Final and have the SO repeat the process to set the application status to Ready for Submission.

If there are no errors and only warnings are found, you are presented with a notice window that gives you the options to set the status to Ready for Submission by clicking the Ready for Submission button or go back to address the warnings by clicking Correct Warnings.

Proceeding with the submission, the Application Information screen updates showing the Ready for Submission status. The SO with the Authorized Organization Representative (AOR) credentials clicks the Submit Application button.

A confirmation window is displayed. Click Submit to proceed and then provide the AOR credentials in the window displayed.

The submission of the multi-project application is now complete.

Resources

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

- 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 building a NIH multi-project application using eRA's ASSIST. Thank You for watching.

	ID	Replacement ID	Replacement Name	Organization	
Cher Money	SCHUMAERJK	STSPOCK	Spock, S'Chn T'Gai	VSA	Overall Pro 001
Ben Round	RMODIR	BEEHIVE	Reed, Janice	VSA	Overall Core 001
Jedi Knight	KNIGHTJ	KELVAN	Kelinda, Terri	VSA	Admin Core 001
Abel Tu	LONGDO	KURZON	Dax, Jadzia	LUA	Core 002
Quin Sential	DSEARS	ALLBETS	Dabo, Leeta	LUA	Pro 002
Ima Doer	DMCCOLE	BONES	McCoy, Leonard	SFA	Pro 003