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## Tips for Using NIH's Application Submission System & Interface for Submission Tracking (ASSIST)

### **Background**

NIH's ASSIST System is used for the electronic preparation and submission of applications through Grants.gov to NIH. ASSIST provides many features to improve data quality, including: pre-population of organization and PD/PI data, pre-submission validation of many agency business rules and the generation of data summaries in the application image used for review.



**\*All ASSIST users must have eRA Commons credentials.** Contact your SPA Pre-Award rep as early in the process as possible. SPA will ensure that all users have one of the following roles, as appropriate:

- Signing Official (SO)
- Administrative Official (AO)
- Principal Investigator (PI)
- Assistant (ASST)

### **Key features of ASSIST**

- Personnel data is Pre-populated from eRA Commons user profiles
- Validates Grants.gov and NIH business rules before submission
- Provides preview of entire NIH application image before submission
- Generates table of contents, headers & footers
- Tracks Grants.gov and eRA Commons submission status

### **Resources**

- ASSIST User Guide: [http://era.nih.gov/files/ASSIST\\_user\\_guide.pdf](http://era.nih.gov/files/ASSIST_user_guide.pdf)
- ASSIST Login site: <https://public.era.nih.gov/assist>
- PDF: [Getting Started: Preparing Your Single-project Application Using ASSIST](#)
- PDF: [Getting Started: Preparing Your Multi-project Application Using ASSIST](#)
-  [Frequently Asked Questions for ASSIST](#)
- Webinar: [Introduction to Using ASSIST](#)
- Webinar: [Using ASSIST to Prepare and Submit Multi-project Applications to NIH](#)

### **Technical Assistance**

ASSIST is a system developed and managed by NIH. The eRA Commons Help Desk is your first stop for support:

Web: <http://era.nih.gov/help/>

Toll Free: 1-866-504-9552

TTY: 301-451-5939

Hours: Mon - Fri, 7am - 8pm Eastern Time

ASSIST Online Help: <http://era.nih.gov/erahelp/ASSIST/>



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## Multi-project Applications in ASSIST

A multi-project application is a single submission with multiple, interrelated components that share a common focus or objective. ASSIST distinguishes “**components**” from “**component types**”:

A **component** is a distinct, reviewable part of a multi-project application or progress report for which there is a business need to gather detailed information identified in the funding opportunity announcement (FOA).

- Components typically include general information (component organization, project period, project title, etc.), performance sites, personnel, and budget.
- The FOA defines the construction and naming convention for the application; the funded application defines the construction and naming convention for the progress report.
- Components may also be referred to as “cores” or “projects.”

A **component type** is a named, agency-defined collection of forms that may be repeated within an application.

- Let's say a specific multi-project application includes one Administrative Core, two Core and three Project components. In this example, the application includes 6 components using three different component types (Administrative Core, Core, Project).
- 'Overall' is a special component type with a single occurrence in every multi-project application.

## How are complex applications structured in ASSIST?

- **A single Overall Component:** The Overall component will have data collection comparable to a single-project application that describes the entire application and how each of the components fit together
- **Additional Components:** Some number of additional component types (e.g., Admin Core, Project, Core, FOA-specific, etc.) Funding opportunity announcements will clearly specify the types of components that will be required in complex application submissions for that opportunity. **NOTE: Although components *within a particular component type* can be re-ordered, you cannot re-arrange the order of component types.** To re-order individual components within a component type, see the [ASSIST User Guide](#), **Change Component Order** section.
- **Summaries:** As part of the application image creation process, ASSIST will automatically generate summaries of budgets and other information compiled from the data provided in the individual components (e.g., component and categorical roll-ups of budget data). These summaries help reviewers and NIH staff work with the application.

## Define the Layout of Your Application

- Think about the components you plan to include
- PD/PIs for entire application
- Project lead for each component
- Organization lead for each component
- Project Title for each component
- Start/End dates
- Determine the order you want the components to appear in the final application image
- Create the application shell



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### **Define Your Team and Provide Application Access**

- ASSIST automatically provides application access to some individuals based on their Commons roles or role on the application
- All SOs and AOs at the applicant institution have edit access for the entire application
- All PD/PIs listed on the Overall application have edit access for the entire application
- The Project Leads have edit access for their components
- The person that initiates the application has edit access for the entire application

### **Managing Access through SPA: HMS Signing Officials can**

- Manage application access for other users
- Delegate “Access Maintainer” authority to other users within their institution
- Control access across these variables:
  - Entire application vs. specific components
  - Read vs. Edit
  - Budget vs. Non-budget data

### **File Size Limits**

NIH expects most applications to be 100 Mb or less, but the system can handle applications up to 1.2 Gb. Individual attachments within an application can be up to 35 Mb.

### **Prepare application for submission**

- Once all application components have a status of ‘Final’, you will need to set the Application Status to ‘All Components Final.’ Go to the Application Information screen (you may need to use the bread crumbs at the top of the page) and use the Update Submission Status button under Actions to change the status.
- Before an application can be submitted, it must pass validations. To perform validations against the application use the Validate Application button from the Actions section while on the Application Information screen. When an application passes validations (i.e., no Errors identified), its status is updated to ‘All Components Validated’.
- You can then update the status to Ready for Submission and submit the application.

### **Viewing complete application as it will be seen by reviewers**

After NIH receives an error-free application package, it assembles the final application the way a reviewer would see it. The PI and SO have two full weekdays (Monday - Friday, excluded Federal holidays) to view the application after which the submission process is complete and the application moves forward to NIH Receipt and Referral.

### **ASSIST’s “inactivity timer”**

**Save often!** ASSIST will log you out after 45 minutes of inactivity. The following activities reset the timer:

- Saving data on a form
- Adding an attachment
- Adding an additional block of data on a form (e.g. Sr/Key person, performance site)
- Validate application
- Preview application

Note that typing information into the fields of a form without taking an action to Save or Add will not reset the timer.