ERA Forum Webinar Series: Q&As

This document contains questions and answers about the Proposal Submission Modernization (PSM) (Sponsored Projects Office (SPO) and Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) access and activities) and Proposal Automated Compliance Checking topics discussed during the ERA Forum webinar. The webinar was held on March 15th, 2017. For further questions about PSM and Proposal Automated Compliance Checking, please send an email to nsferaforum@nsf.gov. For questions regarding NSF proposal and award policies and procedures, please send an email to policy@nsf.gov.

1. Related to SPO and AOR access and activities:

a. Will the PI still need to grant the AOR access to their proposal?

Yes, the PI will still need to provide access to the AOR. This process is not changing.

b. Since the concept showed a space for a Research in Undergraduate Institutions (RUI) Impact Statement, where does the RUI non-PhD granting institution certification go?

The Proposal Forms page is dynamically driven based on the solicitation. If it is a required section, it will display on the Proposal Forms page.

c. What are the "Actions" that you showed in the Post Submission Actions concept?

An example of an action would be withdrawing the proposal after submission. These actions would be the same as those available in FastLane's post submission module.

d. Will Proposal File Updates no longer be listed as pending actions in the proposal approval inbox?

If Proposal File Updates are pending approval, it will still display as pending that action approval.

e. How does an "SRO" (SPO) edit a proposal before it is submitted?

The SPO can edit a proposal before it's submitted, once the PI makes the proposal available to the SPO from the proposal forms page.

f. Regarding post-submission actions, will OAUs be able to input data into these actions in the new format? Will OAUs be able to do post-award items like budget updates on transfers or adding REU supplement information?

OAU permissions are currently under evaluation. NSF will analyze ERA Forum survey responses on this topic to determine OAU permissions and capabilities moving forward.

g. Will "view access" be automatic for SPOs or AORs without the PI granting access?

SPO and AOR permissions associated with proposal preparation are currently under evaluation. NSF will analyze ERA Forum survey responses on this topic to determine future capabilities.

h. Currently there's an SPO permission that seems to be combined with as well as distinct from an AOR. Can there be an SPO permission for all those assisting, editing, reviewing for AOR, etc., functions that SPOs do that is distinct from AOR?

NSF is considering this and conducting an analysis.

i. Will SROs (SPOs) have automatic access to reviewer comments, or can there be a place when submitting that the PI can give SRO permission to receive them?

This functionality has not been determined yet.

j. Will the PI still be able to allow "edit access" to SPO prior to granting submission access?

Yes, NSF is working on establishing that workflow.

k. If one AOR submits a proposal on behalf of another AOR (for example, for vacation coverage), is there a way to list the "original" AOR on the application?

Right now, the system only captures the AOR who is submitting the proposal. This was changed several years ago.

l. Is the function to "submit", but not sign by the SPO contact, still available? My understanding is that the AOR logs in separately and just signs the proposal.

The AOR must sign and submit the proposal. The SPO is not able to submit the proposal, this was disabled a few years ago.

m. Can the "Last Updated" column include a timestamp so that the AOR can determine if it has been changed following an initial review of the proposal?

Currently, the "Last Updated" shows only the day, though NSF will explore using a timestamp as well.

n. Can the AOR and PI still edit the same proposal simultaneously?

NSF is currently analyzing the concept of locking the proposal, in which there cannot be edits while the AOR is reviewing.

o. Will the PI be able to make changes when full "SRO" access is granted?

NSF is currently in the process of establishing the PI/SPO workflow. This specific functionality has not been determined yet.

p. When a PI submits the application to the SPO, do they still have the option to limit the type of access granted? For example, can they only give the SPO view and edit, and not submit access?

Yes.

q. Can NSF develop a registration page where the PI completes the necessary fields and then the AOR need only approve their affiliation?

NSF is working on an initiative to modernize and streamline the registration functionality and will engage the research community to gather opinions and perspectives in the coming months.

2. Related to Proposal Automated Compliance Checking:

a. Is there a way for a non-PI/CoPI and a non-AOR user to check for proposal errors?

Currently in FastLane, any user who can view the proposal can also check for proposal compliance. This may include OAUs, SPOs, PIs/Co-PIs, and AORs.

b. Will Other Authorized Users (OAUs) have the ability to "check proposal" and "forward to SPO?”

Yes, OAUs will have access to compliance checks and will be able to forward to the SPO.

c. Can the automated compliance check chart be posted as a text searchable PDF?

This is something NSF is looking into.

d. How often is the compliance check document updated?

The proposal automated-compliance checklist is updated with each new release of compliance

checks.

e. Will PIs be able to forward the proposal to the SPO before all compliance checks are complete, allowing the SPO to assist with uploads or editing?

Yes. For example, if the budget is not filled out, PIs will still have the ability to send to the SPO to edit. However, they cannot send the proposal to the AOR prior to successfully compliance checking, so that no errors are returned.

f. Are there any plans to have the compliance checks verify the formatting of the biosketch and other documents?

NSF is currently researching this.

g. With a "view only" mode, does this mean that a PI will not be able to "Allow SRO Access" until all compliance checks pass?

No, the PI will be able to Allow SRO Access even if all compliance checks do not pass.

h. For PDF compliance checking, will the fonts need to be embedded (i.e., font size)?

Formatting checks for font type and font size will be compliance checked upon upload of a PDF by the user.

i. Will the system be able to catch exceptions to the page limits, such as the 20 page limit for large projects? On FastLane, we've received warnings.

Proposal automated compliance checks may trigger either an error or warning depending on the type of check run and proposal being submitted. Currently, in the case of Center/Research Infrastructure type of proposals, some checks may trigger a warning. NSF is currently working to determine these errors and warnings for the new system.

j. Regarding the Special Exception to the deadline checkbox/single copy document module currently in FastLane, should this be used for extensions NOT related to Natural/Anthropogenic events?

Only use the checkbox on the cover sheet if there has been a natural event. Do NOT use this checkbox for extensions. Program officers do follow up when this checkbox is checked.

3. Related to the Data Universal Numbering System (DUNS) Number:

a. What is a DUNS qualifier?

The DUNS qualifier is a nine digit number that includes a four-character suffix, called a "plus 4," that identifies other locations associated with your entity. Users obtain this number when registering their university on Dun & Bradstreet.

b. On the submission screen, will the AOR need to type in the DUNS number, or will that auto-populate?

The DUNS number will need to be manually typed. Manual entry verifies that the number is correct, and that the user is indeed the AOR.

c. Can the DUNS number/qualifier auto-populate from the institutional profile?

The DUNS number will need to be manually typed.

4. Related to Collaborative Proposals:

a. Will the list of required sections be altered automatically when a user is not the lead institution for linked collaborations?

Yes, required proposal sections will be dynamically available based on the solicitation, and whether you are a lead or non-lead on the proposal.

b. We're currently only able to see the other institution's documents by printing the entire proposal. Will there be a way to see their documents in a more integrated way when reviewing proposals?

NSF will be evaluating this suggestion.

c. On Collaborative proposals, will the Lead Institution be able to see when the other institutions have submitted their proposals?

NSF is currently evaluating this capability.

d. How do we connect multiple submissions?

Via linking for separately submitted collaborative proposals. This functionality will be the same in PSM as it is in FastLane.

e. Will temporary proposal numbers printed on each individual proposal section return to collaborative proposals? This information was available on proposals but disappeared sometime in 2016.

This is something NSF is currently looking into.

5. Related to Grants.gov:

a. Will the updates you discussed in the webinar impact Grants.gov as a submission option?

No.

b. When a proposal is submitted through Grants.gov, will it be inserted into FastLane where the PI or AOR will then go for the initial access, and then be directed to the submission in Research.gov? Or will it be inserted directly into Research.gov?

If a proposal is submitted via Grants.gov, it will remain in Grants.gov. Eventually, proposals will move to the Research.gov platform.

c. Although only 2% of proposals are submitted to NSF via Grants.gov, will NSF continue to update the related Grants.gov packages on time so that all proper forms are in the packages?

Yes, NSF will continue to update the related Grants.gov packages on time.

d. Considering the numerous online proposal platforms (i.e., Workspace, Assist, Research.gov) will NSF, NIH and Grants.gov consider moving to a one-submission platform?

In theory, Grants.gov is intended to serve this purpose, though it does not offer the full functionality of FastLane and Research.gov.

6. Related to PSM implementation:

a. What is the target date for PSM implementation?

PSM will have a phased implementation approach, starting with a pilot program solicitation targeted for the beginning of 2018. After the initial pilot solicitation is rolled out, NSF will target a broader rollout throughout 2018.

b. Will all post award actions be available at the go-live date? Or is there a phased approach?

The PSM effort includes proposal preparation and submission pre-award activities, and not post-award actions.

c. Will there be a beta test site for us to use prior to the release?

Yes, there will be a beta test/demo site for PSM. NSF will reach out to the research community for help with this testing.

d. Will the FastLane demo site continue to be accessible and updated with the new FastLane features being rolled out?

Yes, the FastLane demo site will continue to be accessible and updated. NSF will also be standing up a demo site for PSM.

e. Will there come a time when proposals will be initiated exclusively in Research.gov, as opposed to Fastlane with a re-direction to Research.gov?

Yes.

f. At some point, will FastLane be eliminated and we will work solely with Research.gov? If so, when will this happen?

Yes, NSF will eventually sunset FastLane as functionality moves to Research.gov. However, NSF does not have concrete timeframe yet.

g. Is there a Single Sign On (SSO) between FastLane and Research.gov? I currently need to re-login if I'm going to Research.gov.

SSO exists from Research.gov to FastLane.

7. Other questions:

a. Has the Project Summary limit changed?

No, there is still a one page limit for the Project Summary.

b. What is an OAU?

“OAU” stands for “Other Authorized User”. This individual assists in preparing the proposal.

c. Will the named single copy documents be labeled as "single copy documents" as well as by name (e.g., COA)?

Instead of a single copy or supplementary form label, NSF will list the actual name for the section.

d. If a PI submits multiple proposals, will their information autofill from one proposal to another?

Yes, this is something NSF is working towards.

e. Will there still be a PDF conversion function for documents in the new system?

During the pilot, NSF plans to only accept PDFs, because tools to convert documents to PDF are readily available.

f. Will the view, edit, and submit functions remain?

Yes.

g. Will we be able to upload an Excel spreadsheet into the budget section like we are currently able to do?

NSF plans on having a template available in the future, like FastLane has currently. For the pilot, it will be a form.

h. Other than through the ERA Forum surveys, is there a way to contact you with ideas or suggestions?

Yes, you can email the ERA Forum team at any time with questions and suggestions at nsferaforum@nsf.gov