

Tips and Tricks for Successful eRA Submissions

This document contains information on the transition of the NOAA grants management platform to eRA, with an emphasis on the most common validation errors applicants have been encountering and tips to avoid them. Additional training and information for DOC Applicants can be found [here](#).

Understanding the Submission Process in Grants.gov and eRA

When an organization submits an application in Grants.gov, the application package will be submitted to two separate sets of validations. *An application must pass both sets of validation checks before a NOFO due date to be successfully submitted.*

- (1) The first check occurs at Grants.gov and only checks for: (1) on-time submission and (2) that attachments are attached to each required form in the application package. If an application passes those checks, Grants.gov will indicate a successful submission by sending an email to the applicant from do_not_reply@grants.gov that contains a tracking number. However, this does not mean that the application has successfully passed the eRA check.
- (2) The second, more robust check, happens at the eRA level and has been causing numerous rejections. After Grants.gov submission, the PI listed on the application will receive an email notification from era-notify@mail.nih.gov. This email will either confirm a successful submission to eRA or list validation errors and warnings associated with the application. If validation errors are indicated they must be addressed, the application must be resubmitted via Grants.gov (which will create a new Grants.gov tracking number) **before the NOFO closes**, and the listed PI must receive an email from era-notify@mail.nih.gov with no errors indicated before an application will be considered a successful submission to eRA. Validation warnings will not prevent a successful submission. Alternatively, applicants can view the submission status of an application in eRA Commons.

Common eRA Validation Errors

- eRA Commons Username

If an organization needs to register for an eRA account, **we recommend doing so as soon as possible** because this account can take weeks to be approved by eRA staff. Applicants can find more information on registering your organization in eRA Commons [here](#).

The transition to eRA means that applicants are now required to register in [eRA Commons](#) for grant application and management. In order to successfully submit a proposal through eRA, the PI listed on the application materials **must** have an

eRA Commons account, and that Commons account must be (1) affiliated with the applicant organization and (2) hold the PI role within that organization. That valid, affiliated **Commons Username** (not PI name or email address) must then be included on the application materials in the following place(s):

- In SF424 Packages: In the “4. Applicant Identifier” box of the SF424.
- In R&R Packages: In the “Credential, e.g., agency login” field of the Research & Related Senior/Key Person Profile Form for the first listed PI.

Failure to register in eRA Commons and to include a valid, affiliated PD/PI Commons Username in those places listed above will prevent the successful submission of an electronic application. Additional personnel included on the form do not need to include this information; however, eRA will create a *warning* recommending that those personnel also include their eRA Commons Username(s). *Warning messages do not prevent successful submissions*. Again - it is **not** required that those additional personnel include valid eRA Commons Username(s) regardless of the warnings created by the eRA system.

- **Congressional District**

Applicants are required to enter their Congressional District on the SF424 (both standard SF424 and R&R SF424) in a very specific format. For tips on finding and entering Congressional District correctly, applicants can review the info found [here](#). Briefly, it should consist of their state’s two-letter abbreviation and end with a three-digit district number. A hyphen separates the two parts, like this, “VA-001” [State of Virginia – 1st Congressional District]. Any other format (for example “VA001” or “VA-01”) will result in an error and rejection from eRA.

- **Zip Codes**

On every form, zip codes for US addresses must be 9-digits.

- **Formatting Issues**

In addition, we’re seeing many error messages resulting from eRA formatting requirements. The majority of errors we’ve seen related to formatting are:

- All documents MUST be in PDF form
- File sizes that are too large (over 100 MB)
- Including paper (page) size larger than standard letter paper size (8 ½" x 11")
- File names that are too long (greater than 50 characters including spaces)
- Including invalid characters in the file name
- Not “flattening” the PDF prior to attachment

To avoid other common issues, please take the time to review the full list of eRA formatting requirements found [here](#).