THE NO TEARS NRSA:
HOW TO SUCCESSFULLY PREPARE AND SUBMIT AN INDIVIDUAL NRSA APPLICATION

NARRATION TRANSCRIPT

Welcome to the No Tears NRSA: How to Successfully Prepare and Submit an Individual NRSA Fellowship Application. This is one of the microlearning online courses offered through Northwestern Sponsored Research.

Course Description

The purpose of this module is to summarize the process and explain electronic systems requirements involved with preparing and submitting an individual NIH National Research Service Award (NRSA) fellowship proposal. These things are required in order to submit a fellowship application, but they are not detailed in NIH Funding Opportunity Announcements the same way that required administrative and technical components are. Specifically, we will:

- Explain relevant terminology
- Introduce relevant electronic systems and their uses when submitting an individual NRSA
- Outline a recommended timeline for proposal development and submission and
- Provide helpful hints and resources*.*

Learning Objectives

Once you have completed this microlearning you will be able to:

- Identify relevant electronic systems and complete required tasks in order to submit an individual NRSA proposal
- Understand the different responsibilities of the Fellow, the RA assisting the Fellow, and the Sponsored Research office throughout the proposal development and submission process
- Outline a proposal development plan that will enable you to submit a "no tears" NRSA

What Is An NRSA?

When we say "no tears NRSA" we mean an application for which all pre-submission requirements are completed BEFORE the due date of the application. With a no tears application, in the hours or minutes before a submission deadline you can avoid possibly tear-inducing system-to-system errors, urgent emails, and stressful conversations.

Let's start by discussing some basic terminology that will put you on the path to a "No Tears" application.

First of all, what is an NRSA? The **Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Awards (NRSAs)** are a part of the National Institutes of Health Research Training and Career Development Program. NRSAs support mentored training opportunities in biomedical, behavioral, and clinical research for individuals at various stages of education and training.

NRSAs are granted to both individual and institutional recipients. This online training focuses solely on the NRSA fellowships granted to individuals, such as graduate students. These

fellowships fall under the **"F Series"** of funding opportunities. That is, funding opportunities with activity codes F30, F31, F32, and F33.

The other kind of NRSAs are training grants awarded to institutions, such as Northwestern University, to fund training programs. The awards fall under the "T" series of funding opportunities. Do NOT confuse F Series and T Series awards as the requirements for them are very different.

More information about NRSA individual fellowships can be found here: NIH Research Training: Individual Fellowships

Key Terminology

Throughout this training, we will use the term "**fellow**" to refer to any individual at Northwestern who is a graduate student, post-doctoral candidate, or clinical resident who is qualified to apply for an individual NRSA as per NIH eligibility requirements.

If you've joined us for our SPOT course "A Beginner's Guide to Sponsored Project Solicitations", you'll recall that a **Funding Opportunity Announcement** or **FOA** is one of the many synonyms for "solicitation." That is, a request from a sponsor for proposals for specific research, development, or training projects. The FOA for the award outlines the application requirements as well as submission information and deadlines, review criteria, and award terms and conditions.

For F Series fellowships, the NIH uses a **"Parent announcement"** or **"PA"**, which is a broad FOA that allows applicants to submit investigator-initiated applications for specific activity codes. Keep in mind that not all NIH Institutes and Centers participate on all parent announcements. So before submitting an application make sure the NIH Institute or Center that might be interested in the proposed research is participating. PA's are open for up to 3 years and use standard due dates.

Individual Fellowship standard due dates occur three times per year in April, August, and December. Of course, always be sure to check the NIH website to confirm specific submission deadlines. NIH Standard Deadlines can be found here: NIH Standard Deadlines

Electronic Systems

The key electronic systems involved with NRSA fellowship preparation process are: InfoEd, eDisclosure, eRA Commons, and ORCID.

InfoEd is Northwestern's enterprise electronic research administration tool for sponsored project proposal submission and award administration. You may notice in Parent Announcements for F Series awards that three options are available for proposal submission: ASSIST, grants.gov workspace, or an institutional system-to-system (S2S) solution. Choose system-to-system: InfoEd is our S2S solution and the preferred submission method for F awards.

eDisclosure is a web-based disclosure system used to complete Northwestern disclosure requirements and to check Conflict of Interest (or COI) compliance status for investigators and

projects. Every fellow who wishes to submit an individual fellowship proposal must complete COI disclosure requirements.

Every fellowship applicant must also have an eRA Commons ID that is correctly set-up. **eRA Commons** is an NIH web interface where signing officials, principal investigators, trainees, and post-docs at institutions can access and share administrative information relating to research grants.

Lastly, fellow applicants must have an ORCiD iD. **ORCiD** is an independent organization that maintains a registry of unique identifiers, called ORCiD IDs, for researchers and scholars. When you use your ORCiD ID in a grant proposal, a publication submission, etc., it can be easily associated with you. When you move from one employer to another, the history of your scholarly outputs persists in ORCID with no manual re-work.

The NRSA Application Process

Assembly on the administrative components for an F series proposal should begin at least a month before the application due date.

Note: At this point, we're assuming that a fellow has already spent a few months planning their application, collaborating with their mentor, and working on the technical components of the proposal. If not, well then there may be some tears even if the admin portion goes swimmingly.

The overall process looks something like this:

- At least one month prior to the proposal deadline, the fellow informs their research administrator of their intent to submit an NRSA application. Remember: the Fellow should be FINISHING the scientific portion of the proposal around this time, not just starting it.

- Next the RA initiates a record in InfoEd and confirms that 1) the fellow is listed in InfoEd and 2) they have an eRA Commons ID that is correctly affiliated. If the Commons ID is not correctly affiliated, then the RA will work with Sponsored Research to affiliate it. Meanwhile, the fellow requests letters of reference and ensures that they are submitted by the referees by the deadline.

- Once finished with these preparatory steps, around two weeks from the deadline, the RA begins to build out the proposal in InfoEd. Any missing information will cause delays in the application process, so it is important for a fellow to provide the RA with all necessary items as required. This includes completing COI disclosure requirements in the eDisclosure system.

- The RA completes the admin components in InfoEd and uploads the fellow's completed science. At least five business days prior to the deadline, the Fellow approves the NRSA application proposal in InfoEd. Finally the RA confirms with SR that the proposal is ready to submit.

Fellow Responsibilities

While the RA will be doing the legwork when it comes to assembling the proposal components in InfoEd, the onus falls on the fellow to start the proposal development process. It is recommended that a Fellow informs their RA of their intent to submit a fellowship application at least **one month BEFORE the due date**.

It is also the Fellow's responsibility to contact individuals about providing **letters of reference** and monitor submission of the letters via eRA Commons. Note that this requires the PI role in Commons, which we'll talk about on the next slide. Timely submission of references is important because required reference letters must be received by NIH by the due date or the application will NOT be reviewed. Keep in mind that this process is completely separate from the InfoEd-based submission of the proposal itself. Reference letters are not verified by the RA or Sponsored Research.

Use these key "getting started" resources available via the onscreen links. You can also check out the "Additional Resources" page at the end of this training to access online courses related to proposal development.

- [SF424 (R&R) Application Guide: Fellowships](#)
- [Reference Letters Submission Process](#)

Because the Fellow serves as the Principal Investigator for an individual NRSA proposal some actions may be required that are not needed when a Fellow's mentor serves as the PI of a proposal. Specifically, a Fellow must be correctly setup in eRA Commons, ORCID, InfoEd, and eDisclosure. We'll discuss each of these systems over the next few slides.

eRA Commons

First, the Fellow will need a valid eRA Commons ID that is correctly affiliated with the **PI role**. In some cases a Fellow may have an existing Commons account with previously assigned role(s), such as from an institutional training grant. However, simply being located in xTrain and/or having a valid Commons ID is not enough – the Fellow MUST have the PI role affiliated with their Commons ID. This PI role allows the Fellow to initiate and monitor the reference letter submission process, which we discussed. The PI role also enables the Fellow to actually submit the proposal to NIH.

Second, the Fellow's mentor must have a **sponsor role** in Commons per NIH guidelines. It's best to ensure this role is set-up correctly ahead of time, especially if the mentor has never been a sponsor before.

If you need to verify or request a Commons account and/or the PI role affiliation for a Fellow's Commons account, submit a Commons request form to the Sponsored Research Business Systems and Operations team. It is recommended that this be done at least **three weeks before the due date**.

ORCiD

The NIH requires that all fellows have an ORCiD ID at the time of submission for individual fellowship and career development awards.

An **ORCID iD** is a universally-accepted unique identifier that connects you to your research outputs and activities, making it easier to track and ensure you receive credit for your work. The ORCID registry is integrated into many systems used by publishers, funders, institutions, and other research-related services.

It is recommended that ORCID iD registration also be done at least **three weeks before the due date**. In addition, it's highly encouraged that you connect your ORCID ID with Northwestern.

Click the on screen link for more information about ORCID Registration and associating your ID with Northwestern: Your ORCiD ID: What You Need To Know.

InfoEd Set-Up

Depending on their current type of appointment at the University, a Fellow may not be in InfoEd. In order to submit a proposal using InfoEd, not only does the Fellow require an active InfoEd account but also their account must be setup to approve proposals. It is recommended that this be done at least **three weeks before the due date**. For more information about InfoEd, including how to request system access, click the on screen link: Northwestern IT: InfoEd.

After the RA has confirmed that the Fellow is correctly setup in InfoEd, the RA can initiate an InfoEd proposal record and begin to build out the proposal. It is recommended that this occur **two weeks before the due date** in order to leave plenty of time to complete the administrative components.

COI & eDisclosure

Conflict of Interest Training and Disclosure Requirements in the eDisclosure system must be completed before a proposal may be submitted. Of course, a Fellow may never before have been subject to COI requirements or have access to eDisclosure. But this is not something that should cause delay. As soon as a proposal is created in InfoEd with the Fellow listed as the PI, a profile for the Fellow will automatically be created in eDisclosure. They will be able to access eDisclosure with their NetID and password, locate the proposal in the system, and verify training dates. It is recommended that a Fellow submit their disclosure one to **two weeks before the application deadline**.

If a Fellow would like to complete COI training requirements BEFORE the proposal is created in InfoEd but they are unable to log in, contact the Northwestern Conflict of Interest Office (NUCOI). Email NUCOI the Fellow's name, NetID, and email address and request that an eDisclosure profile be created for them.

For more information about COI, use the onscreen link to access the COI website: Northwestern Conflict of Interest Office (NUCOI)

Proposal Submission

Finally, the time comes to submit the NRSA application. As with all proposals, it is recommended that **at least five business days prior to the application deadline**, the RA completes the administrative components in InfoEd. The Fellow then approves the proposal so that the RA can send it to Sponsored Research for review. If the Fellow has not already done so, they should also provide the final technical components to their RA for upload.

At least two days before the deadline, the Fellow should be ready to submit the proposal to NIH. The RA will then confirm with Sponsored Research that the proposal is ready to go.

If something goes wrong – for example, system errors that occur during submission – this timeline allows adequate time to fix them and still comfortably meet the proposal deadline. Submitting early also provides the opportunity to review the final submitted proposal in Commons, make any last minute changes if needed, and resubmit.

Yes, in theory, it is possible to submit a proposal all the way up to the deadline, but in order to avoid tears, it is strongly encouraged to submit early instead.

Tips and Tricks

Before we wrap-up, here are some tips and tricks to help you avoid shedding tears during the proposal development process. Really, there are just two simple best practices to remember:

Be proactive

- Fellows: As soon as you decide to submit for a given deadline, seek out your RA to get the proposal process started and provide information to referees. Remember that YOU are the PI for this proposal. You need to follow up as needed, especially to ensure that reference letters are submitted on time.

- RA's: Submit systems requests early so account access is not a roadblock. Specific roles are required in both Commons and InfoEd accounts. While most account requests are completed in one to two days, same-day turn-around is not guaranteed. On occasion creation of a new Commons account can take up to five days.

Work together

- Fellows: Use your RA as a resource. Never forget that a proposal is more than just the science; the non-scientific components are equally as important. Rely on your RA to guide you, and be sure to provide the RA with required items promptly – this includes content needed to complete the administrative components. Any missing information can cause delays in the application process.

- And RA's, remember that fellows are not experienced PIs. You're the expert, and you may need to drive the proposal development process once it's started.

Additional Resourses

Included onscreen is list of resources that may help you prepare and submit an Individual NRSA proposal. This is by no means is an exhaustive list, but these are common tools that can be helpful to reference.

NIH

- [Research Training Program: Individual Fellowships](#)
- [Podcasts for Fellowships](#)
- [NIH Due Dates and Submission Policies](#)
- [Fellowship Instructions for NIH and Other PHS Agencies](#)
- F-Series support ([F30/F31](#), [F32](#), [F33](#))

Northwestern

- [The Graduate School (TGS) Postdoctoral Appointments](#)
- [Sponsored Project Online Training Courses](#)