

Grants Management at NIH

Improved methods for awarding grants

The Case

NIH came to a realization in 2001 that with over 45,000 grant applications coming through their doors that research funding is steadily on the rise and the easiest place to receive this money is the federal government. Social indicators such as 9/11, the aging baby boom generation and the research community becoming more aware of the process to receive grant money are contributing to over 70,000 grant applications slated to come into NIH in 2004 and these numbers are only going to increase significantly over the coming years. There are three grant application review cycles each year, which cause a surge of inbound applications during these cycles.

As volume increased, so did the costs for shipping and handling and the resources to distribute these paper-based applications to reviewers nationwide. Employees and reviewers were unable to access the grant information via a central, enterprise portal and the retrieval and management of the data was paper-based and manual.

The grants management solution NIH implemented, enabled a scalable approach to manage multiple document sources as well as unique content distribution. They now have electronic, searchable access to grant applications from an enterprise portal, allowing for customized distribution to the grant reviewers. Prior to this electronic process, the time to distribute applications was six to eight weeks. This process can now be done in two to three days.



NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH (NIH)

NIH is the steward of medical and behavioral research for the Nation. Its mission is science in pursuit of fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to extend healthy life and reduce the burdens of illness and disability.

SIZE: Office of the Director and 27 Institutes and Centers and employing over 18,000 people.

LOCATION: Bethesda, MD

INDUSTRY: Federal Government

BUSINESS AREAS: Grants Management, CD-R Production/Distribution and GPEA



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The Challenge


In 2001, NIH received 45,000 grant applications and is anticipating over 70,000 for 2004 with page counts for each grant application ranging between 20-1000. The timeframe from grant submission to distribution for review averaged six to eight weeks. Above and beyond the mere volume of paper entering the NIH grants management process, grant review cycles are set at three per year causing a peak-and-valley influx of inbound paper applications. During these peaks, NIH resources were maximized and during slower intervals, resources were underutilized.

During the beginning phase of the grant management process, six copies of each grant application are received then copied six to fifty-five times and then distributed to internal NIH staff as well as via a common carrier to grant reviewers nationwide. NIH was spending an increasing amount of their budget on shipping, copying and manpower resources to facilitate the shipping and handling process. Employees and reviewers were unable to access the information via a common enterprise portal, nor transport the data electronically or on CD. The retrieval and management of the data was paper-based and manual costing more resource time and allowing for more human error.

The Solution

Quality Associates, Inc. (QAI) implemented a cost-effective, integrated technology approach to improving NIH's grants management process. The solution enables a scalable approach to manage multiple document sources as well as unique content distribution. QAI's onsite staff receives all inbound applications, which are scanned on the fly even during peak times. This eliminates the need for copying and each application is now centrally stored in a searchable, PDF format in NIH's system of record for grant applications: the Information for Management, Planning, Analysis, and Coordination II (IMPAC II).

Portability is seamless allowing the Institutes and Centers the capability of creating CD orders from their desktop to provide reviewers with electronic access to their assigned applications. The electronic format allows for customized distribution sets including appendices and summaries. The old manual processing time of six-to-eight weeks is now done in two-to-three days.



QAI's onsite facility and staff handle the peaks and valleys of NIH's grant management process.

The Business Value & Benefits

- Expedited process flow to now handle electronic submissions
- Real-time, on the fly document scanning and retrieval
- Ability to perform keyword searches on PDFs
- Ability to save and search electronic versions of the grant applications
- Six-to-eight weeks of processing time has been cut to a few days
- Onsite conversion, dedicated real estate and QAI employees facilitating the process
- Reviewers now receive a simple envelope containing a CD versus boxes of paper applications
- CD replication is economical, time saving and cost effective, reducing shipping and administrative costs
- Customized distribution addressing conflicts of interest in the reviewer community
- Savings in internal resource allocation
- Reduction in overhead costs

The Technologies

- Kofax Ascent Capture
- Kofax Virtual ReScan (VRS)
- ABBYY Fine Reader
- Doculex PDF Capture Software
- Kodak i280 Scanner
- Kodak i260 Scanner
- Bell & Howell 8100 VRS Scanners
- Bell & Howell 8125 VRS Scanners
- Fujitsu 4099D with VRS Scanners
- Fujitsu 4097D Scanner
- Adobe Acrobat Products
- Rimage Protege II