The Fundamentals of NIH RPPRs

# Introduction

This module is intended for the research administrator helping a researcher prepare an NIH RPPR—a Research Performance Progress Report—which is required for all National of Institutes (NIH) grants and cooperative agreements. Why do you need this module?

* You are being asked to prepare a portion of the RPPR, but you are uncomfortable that you don’t understand how that piece fits into the rest of the submission.
* You are working with a CAREER (K) award postdoc. She not only has never submitted an RPPR, she has endless questions about compliance requirements and institutional routing forms.
* You are a research administrator in a new department. You have helped prepare and submit many progress reports to NSF and other federal agencies, but never one for the NIH.
* The PI has received an email for a delinquent interim RPPR and he asks you what that is.

Under a tight deadline you have looked at the NIH website for help and feel overwhelmed with the [wealth of information on the RPPR](https://grants.nih.gov/grants/rppr/index.htm), but find that much of the information (understandably) is more geared to the principal investigator. You really need a directed version that helps to integrate your efforts with your PIs. What you want is a condensed presentation building the foundation for many NIH RPPR submissions in the future. That is this module. (The same RPPR system and basic directions also are used for grants from the Agency for Heathcare Research and Quality (AHRQ).)

To fully prepare you to successfully submit an NIH RPPR this module will:

* outline a strategy for tackling an RPPR (and all the other annual progress reports you have to do)
* describe requirements for the completing RPPR
* highlight common errors and problems with the RPPR

While it is the PI’s responsibility to complete the RPPR, PIs are generally advised to work with their department research administrator minimally to complete:

* Personnel Effort with completed eRA Commons Profiles
* Updated Other Support
* Unobligated Balance and (if required) the Budget
* Subcontract documentation

To allow you to be able to coach the most novice NIH researcher, this module will touch on every requirement of the RPPR so that you see the total picture. How you actually apply this module will depend on your specific role in preparing the RPPR; regardless, your specific understanding of the continuum of processes will be invaluable to a PI and will ensure the success of submitting an error‐free, on‐time report. Institutions differ on how they implement certain aspects related to the RPPR; so, it is critical that you become familiar with your institution’s specific processes and requirements.

Definitions of terms used in this module will found in the [NIH Grants Policy Statement](https://grants.nih.gov/policy/nihgps/index.htm). The NIH has many excellent RPPR preparation resources for the PI and the research administrator which can be found at the found online in NIH’s [RPPR Index](https://grants.nih.gov/grants/rppr/index.htm).

Do know there are three kinds of RPPR to the NIH:

1. The **Annual RPPR** is a term and condition of award…a report required annually
   * to communicate the grant’s scientific progress,
   * to identify significant changes,
   * to report on personnel, and
   * to describe plans for the subsequent budget period or year.

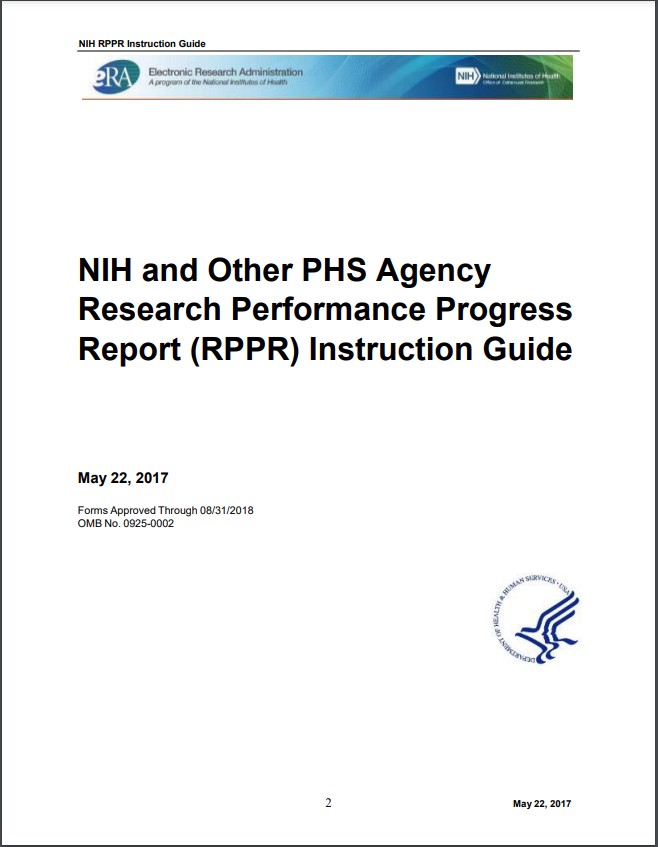
The annual RPPR will be the focus of this presentation. There is also a Final RPPR and an Interim

RPPR.

1. **Final RPPR** is part of grant closeout process to submit project outcomes in addition to the information submitted on the annual RPPR. The Final RPPR is due 120 days from the period of performance end date for the competitive segment.
2. **Interim RPPR** is the report used instead of a Final RPPR when a renewal (Type 2) application has been submitted. If the Type 2 is not funded, the Interim RPPR serves as the Final RPPR for the project. If the Type 2 is funded, the Interim RPPR serves as the annual RPPR for the final year of the previous competitive segment. The data elements collected on the Interim RPPR are the same as for the Final RPPR.

Both Final and Interim RPPRs generally are in the same format as the Annual RPPR, with the addition of project outcomes. Failure to submit Final and Interim RPPRs can delay future funding for the PI, including noncompeting renewals of other grants the PI may have. Further discussion of the Interim and Final RPPRs is outside the scope of this presentation.

In preparing the RPPR, it is essential that applicants follow the instructions in the NIH RPPR Instruction Guide, which can be found online in NIH’s [***RPPR Index***.](https://grants.nih.gov/grants/rppr/index.htm) RPPRs that do not comply with the instructions of the ***NIH RPPR Instruction Guide***—particularly with incomplete or missing information—will likely result in delays in the renewal award.

[](https://grants.nih.gov/grants/rppr/rppr_instruction_guide.pdf)

The RPPR is comprised of eight sections, A‐H, which will be described later in this module. Someone has described navigating and completing the web‐based forms for the RPPR as like working in TurboTax.

Directed questions guide the preparer through the report. In general, the preparer will enter RPPR information directly into text boxes, upload PDF files as text attachment, or select radial buttons which may generate additional questions and requirements. Sometimes, the preparer may select **Nothing to Report** as a response.

# Getting Ready to Submit the RPPR

Project management

The most critical aspect of submitting an RPPR is not the preparation of the RPPR document, but instead it is the monitoring and oversight for the 8‐9 months after the award is issued prior to the preparation of the RPPR. Key elements of project management make the effective research administrator more efficient and, in turn, a more valuable partner with the Principal Investigator. Without effective management of a grant, the actual RPPR process can be excruciating and fraught with issues and problems.

First, the whole process will be easier if you have a process in place to capture information about a grant award from application to grant close out. If you don’t have such a method already, NOW is the time to start. As information from so many places is required to complete the RPPR—the application, the original Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA), the Notice of Award (NoA), institutional processes—we strongly recommend that you have a central “Summary Sheet” tool to collect essential, grant‐specific information for each competitive segment. Ideally, you will have started capturing information during the application process with the FOA and application, but **minimally** you should start at the time of the Notice of Award. We will discuss what you will want to capture in a moment.

While this can be done in Word (or even pen and paper), an ideal way to capture the information is to use OneNote, Evernote, or other digital notetaking app. This gives you enhanced organization. With screen or PDF copies of essential documents in hand, nothing has to be retyped from the NOA or FOA because you can your computer’s Snipping Tool (or Command + Shift + 4 for you Mac users) to cut and paste. Over time you may develop a template of information you routinely capture, but regardless this tool will be especially helpful if you are working on multiple applications and continuations at the same time. This will not only save you time in the preparation of this RPPR (and other agency progress reports), but it will save you even MORE time a year from now when you are doing the next RPPR.

Effective management of a grant involves five elements. How you personally implement these five elements will depend on your role interacting with the PI, a given PI’s experience and approach to research, how much you were involved in the preparation of the application, and your experience and manner interacting with the PI. This involves skills you can grow and for which you become proficient. Remember, effective research administrators are seen by their PIs as problem solvers.

Ideally, the first four of the five elements start within the first few weeks after the initial award is issued by the IC. You will discover that if you purposefully employ this “ounce of prevention” strategy, you will routinely save time and avoid the “pound of cure.”

1. **KNOW THE GRANT**. Review the Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA) the application was in response to and read the application. If you were personally involved in helping with the application submission you already will have captured the critical elements of the FOA in your Summary Sheet, including specific requirements and restrictions for the application and the grant award and possibly special program requirements. At the time of the original award (or when you first handle a grant) check to see if the original Funding Opportunity Announcement dictated additional requirements in Section VI. Award Administration Information. Some awards—like cooperative agreements where the term and conditions are outlined in the funding opportunity announcement—may incorporate the FOA by reference. Other grants like mentored K awards, fellowships, training grants, R25s, and SBIR‐STTR grants routinely have additional or different reporting requirements for the RPPR outlined in Section VI.3 that may or may not be restated as a term and condition of award. For example, mentored K awards require inclusion of a Mentor’s Report. Capturing requirements information from the FOA at the time of the NoA ensures no surprises while preparing the RPPR.

Reading the application is how an effective research administrator often “discovers” things like milestones, foreign components, departmental and institutional commitments, biohazards, and others. At a minimum, read the abstract, the specific aims, the materials and methods, and the budget and budget justification. Ideally, all of the “things” are initially disclosed by the PI and/or caught in the institutional review of an application, but realistically (without any malintent) things can be missed and regardless, YOU need this knowledge NOW to effectively manage the grant.

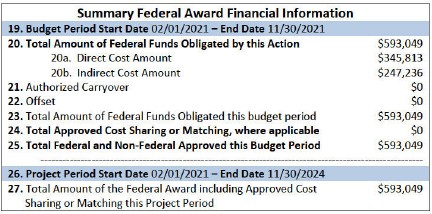
For one application, for example, your will capture in your Summary Sheet that the grant includes vertebrate animals (specifically, rats), uses radioisotopes, and includes a consortium/subcontract with SUNY‐Albany. Each of these items has regulatory compliance implications. Capturing

elements information from the application, minimally at the time of the NoA, will expedite your efforts in preparing the RPPR.

1. **READ THE NOTICE OF AWARD (NoA).** Thoroughly read the entire Notice of Award each year, including any revised or Supplement NoAs received for the grant during the current budget period. Serious issues frequently arise because the PI and research administrator did not carefully read the NoA. If something is different than expected or appears incorrect, steps should be taken immediately to discuss with the awarding IC and correct as needed. Once funds are drawn down all of the terms and conditions of the award are accepted. Key items, requirements, and restrictions from the NoA should be noted in your Summary Sheet.

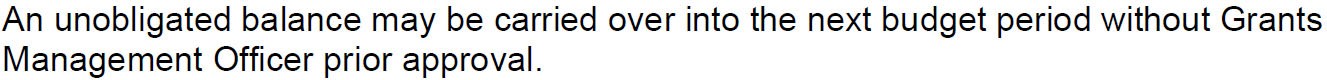
At the time of award the recipient and PI should thoroughly read and take particular note of multiple items in the Notice of Award that specifically impacts the RPPR. If something is different than expected or appears incorrect, steps should be taken immediately to work with NIH to correct an issue.

* The budget period for the current award. Especially if this is the first RPPR in the competitive segment, it is essential to verify the budget period end date for the current budget period, which is item number 19 on the cover sheet of the Notice of Award. This is particularly important for the first year of a competitive segment, as the first budget period typically is less than exactly 12 months, meaning the start date of the second budget period will NOT be the same month and day as the first budget period. The budget period start date for the next budget period also impacts the due date of the RPPR. See how this first budget period is only ten months. Sometimes mistakes are made in the noncompeting award: for example, during Leap year a NoA budget period ending on February 28 instead of February 29.



* Look at Section III of the Notice of Award and note if the grant award is under automatic carryover. If the grant is not under automatic carryover, a prior approval request to the granting IC will be needed to carryover the remaining funds from one budget period into the next budget period. This

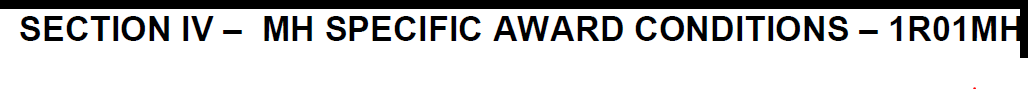
subject is detailed in Section 8.1.2.4 of the *NIH Grants Policy Statement*. Generally, this designation will not change during a competitive segment, but in the uncommon situation when it does, it will alter the grant’s requirements.



* Immediately following the reference to automatic carryover in Section III, look to see if the grant award is under SNAP…the Streamlined Noncompeting Award Process and note this in the Summary Sheet. The due date of the RPPR and actual RPPR preparation requirements are affected by whether or not the grant is or is not under SNAP. For all SNAP awards the submitted progress report does not include detailed budget information. Generally, this designation does not change during a competitive segment, but in the uncommon situation when it does, it will alter the grant’s requirements.



* Carefully read Section IV terms and conditions in the NoA and capture requirements and restrictions to your Summary Sheet. This section not only outlines requirements and restrictions expected to occur during the budget year of the grant, it may also dictate “routine” processes for the RPPR…like PI effort, reporting and resource sharing. For most grants, especially after the first year, this section will be minimal, but in some situations—for example cooperative agreements or grants having problems—additional requirements will be specifically outlined in the NoA. If the grant has received a supplement, Section IV of the supplement’s NoA commonly has special reporting requirements for the RPPR. If you are handling a grant for the first time during a competitive segment, it is prudent to review each prior Notice of Award from the segment. A term describing what is expected for the project period may be clearly stated in the first Notice of Award issued, but not be restated in subsequent budget period NoAs.



* If any revised notices of award or supplements are awarded during the budget year, take note of requirements and of any items that may need to be addressed in the RPPR

1. **ESTABLISH A TIMELINE.** Now that you have reviewed the application, the FOA, and the NoA and captured critical items in your Summary Sheet, establish a timeline. Note and act on any items that need immediate action at the time of award, e.g., actions to remove a restriction, steps to establish a consortium/subcontract subaward. Add any time‐sensitive, grant‐specific requirements (including the RPPR) to the timeline. At a minimum, schedule an initial (< 2 weeks) and a mid‐point grant review for yourself, if not with the PI.
2. **ENGAGE IN PROACTIVE BUDGETING**: During the first few weeks of the grant and each year at the time of award, compare the awarded budget to the application or the previous year NoA projected budget. If differences don’t make sense or are not otherwise explained in the NoA, immediately contact the IC. Once the budget is established determine which amounts need to be specific commitments (e.g., PI summer salary, equipment). With the remainder of the funds, establish a burn rate that will help you and the PI monitor spending, ideally on a monthly or bi‐monthly basis. Review potential issues with the PI. This process is above‐and‐beyond the routine monitoring of grant account expenses.
3. **ROUTINELY CHECK IN WITH THE PI:** Is anything for the grant outstanding? Have changes occurred with the research, especially changes that require prior approval? Are there any changes or surprises with the budget? Has the PI talked to their Program Officer? If a change requiring prior approval has occurred without approval, immediate action will be needed, and you should reach out to your grants office for guidance on how to proceed. Section 8.1.2 of the NIH Grants Policy Statement describes the activities and/or expenditures that require NIH prior approval, and you should be familiar with the requirements and your institution’s processes for handling them. The effective research administrator is always part detective. For example, when the PI asks to set a consortium with the University of Toronto on the previously described grant with a consortium with SUNY‐Albany, the effective research administrator knows that addition of a foreign component (in this case Canada) requires prior approval before proceeding.

Actually, one might argue more broadly for a sixth element of effective grants project management and that is keeping on top of NIH grants policies and procedures. Like much of research administration, NIH policies and procedures are rarely static. A given topic evolves rapidly and the institution must react to the new and changing requirements. So, in addition to having ready access to the current copy of the NIH Grant Policy Statement, the effective research administrator who routinely handles NIH Grants minimally subscribes either to the [NIH Guide Weekly TOC Weekly LISTSERVE](https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/listserv_dev.htm) or the RSS (Really Simple News Syndication) Feed. This provides regular, timely updates on policy notices as well as FOAs (Funding Opportunity Announcements), and NOSIs (Notices of Special Interest in the NIH Guide to Grants and Contracts.



The most effective, complete RPPRs with few (if any) issues are the ones prepared as a partnership between the PI and the research administrator. As soon as a Notice of Award is issued the RPPR link for the next budget period becomes available in the Commons. The report is designed so that the PI can complete the entire report. Once initiated, the system status of the RPPR becomes *PD/PI Work in Progress.*

Your work on the RPPR will be dependent on the division of labor between you and the PI, plus your organization’s processes for handling the RPPR for institutional sign off. The eRA Commons functionally dictates how an RPPR will be handled:

* Only the PI or their delegate can initiate the RPPR. For multi‐PI grants, only the Contact PI or their delegate can initiate the RPPR. .
* A PI may delegate Progress Report preparation to any user with the Assistant (ASST) role. This would typically be a departmental administrator. SO’s can also delegate RPPR preparation to an ASST on behalf of the PI.
* Only a Signing Official (or PI if they delegated to Submit) is allowed to submit the RPPR.

Some institutions routinely delegate roles…for example, allowing PIs to directly submit SNAP (Streamlined Noncompeting Award RPPRs, while other institutions limit delegation. Make certain you are completely versed on how your institution handles NIH progress report submission. Then determine a clear division of labor for the RPPR with each PI. A PI can delegate to a departmental administrator (and many do) who can prepare appropriate sections and review and support the PI on other sections. Know that even if you

prepare a section—e.g., Other Support—it is the PI (or Contact PI) who signs off and is responsible for the content of the submission.

If you don’t have ASST permissions, you may want to ask your PI to give them to you so that you can help.

If you have delegated permissions to work on the RPPR, be aware that only one person can access the RPPR at a time. It’s often said that the mindset for working on an RPPR is like using TurboTax. Some PIs will need little, if any, help. Other researchers, especially newer investigators, will be well‐served with more support. Often, a well‐timed question to the PI by the research administrator is exactly what is needed. Most issues with an RPPR are errors of omission rather than sins of commission: catching omissions will allow the PI and you to get things back on track as quickly and smoothly possible. This module includes a number of coaching hints you can provide your PIs.

When is the RPPR due? The PI receives email reminders of when the RPPR is due. In addition, with the organization’s IPF (Institutional Profile File) number, one can pull a report of pending progress reports due for the institution within the next four months. The research administrator overseeing a grant will want to start a month before the RPPR is due: more if it is a complex award. The timing of when an RPPR is due is grant‐specific. 1) Streamlined Noncompeting Award Process (SNAP) RPPRs are due on the 15th of the month, roughly 45 days before the next budget start date. Remember that designation of a grant being “subject to” the SNAP is noted in Section III of NoA. 2) Non‐SNAP RPPPRs are due on the 1st of the month, roughly 60 days before the next budget start date; 3) Fellowship RPPRs are due two months before the beginning date of the next budget period; and 4) Multi‐year funded RPPRs are due on the anniversary of award the budget/project period. Occasionally, the NoA will indicate a different due date which will supersede these dates. Like all NIH deadlines, when a deadline falls on a weekend or federal holiday. the due date is automatically extended to the next business day. Hopefully, you already know the due date for each of the grants in your portfolio, because you extracted that information at the time of the first Notice of Award

Regardless of the division of labor, six things should be done in preparation for submission of the RPPR well in advance of starting the web‐based system.



## REFER TO THE CURRENT NOTICE OF AWARD AND ORIGINAL FUNDING OPPORTUNITY ANNOUNCEMENT

If you have already extracted critical information from the Funding Opportunity Announcement and the Notice of Award, you only need to refer to your Summary Sheet; otherwise, you must thoroughly read these documents to identify essential requirements and restrictions to prepare the RPPR. Don’t forget to review any revised and supplement NoAs. At a minimum, failure to address key requirements from the FOA and Notice of Award will cause delays in award.

## AS APPLICABLE, REVIEW THE LAST RPPR SUBMISSION

Depending on institutional processes and the PI, you may or may not have direct access to the RPPR that was submitted for the prior year. At a minimum you should ask the PI to share a copy. Attention to several items from the prior year’s document can save process time and reduce issues. Again, how you choose to handle each of these items will be dependent on your institution’s processes and your role working with the PI on the preparation of the RPPR.

* + If contact information has changed for the PI or the institution since the prior submission, needed changes must be completed and saved in the eRA Commons Profile.
  + Major Goals/Specific Aims that will be described in **Section B.1** must remain unchanged from year to year unless prior approval is obtained. A PI can propose changes to the specific aims for the next budget period at the time of the RPPR, but if changes have already been “implemented” without prior approval, it is possible that the IC may not accept those changes. This leaves an institution with a noncompliant grant that may involve disallowed costs for expenditures associated with the unapproved changes.
  + If the grant involves consortium/subcontract performance sites, at least several weeks in advance of the deadline request all documentation necessary for the RPPR from each subcontract PI, including information required for **Sections D.2, G.10, (**and if required) **Section H** discussed later in this module. If significant delays have occurred in setting up subaward agreements, this could have a significant effect on the grant’s unobligated balance.
  + The IC has the expectation that problems or issues identified in the previous RPPR have been addressed, particularly those items identified in **Section F.2**. For example, it is not uncommon for human subject recruitment of a project to get off to a slow start in the first year of a grant. However, by the time of the second or even third RPPR, if recruitment is still significantly behind and the previously described plans for addressing recruitment are not working (that is, poor progress), the IC may take extra steps, like requiring an interim progress report 6 months into the next budget period. Actions taken for poor progress will be grant and IC specific. If a particular grant is having scientific or recruitment issues, it is typically helpful for the PI to talk to their Program Officer when the problems arise…in advance of submitting the RPPR. Just remind the investigator that if Program “agrees to” any significant changes, a written request and approval of the change is required **before** the change can be implemented. Depending on the timing, the proposed change may be included in the RPPR itself in **Section F. Changes**.
  + If the previous RPPR reported an unobligated balance (**Section G.10**), what was the explanation/justification for that balance? The IC has an expectation that a grantee has a plan for a large unobligated balance, that matches the science and period of performance. We will discuss unobligated balances again later in this module.
  + Check with PI about any other communications they may have had with their Program Officer or Grant Specialist. Such communications may indicate needed prior approvals or otherwise inform the research administrator of necessary steps.

## GENERATE OTHER SUPPORT FOR SENIOR/KEY PERSONNEL

Routinely, a research administrator or support staff—not the PI—generates other support for the RPPR Other support is needed in the RPPR ONLY when there is a change in other support for the PI or the individuals recipient considers key—**not** just those personnel named in the Notice of Award—OR for new senior/key personnel added to the grant. Other Support is discussed where it is specifically required in Section D.2.c below. This requirement can be challenging for the research administrator, especially when senior/key personnel are in other departments or are at other institutions. The best solution to minimize issues is to start early.

## CONFIRM THAT APPLICABLE IRB AND IACUC APPROVALS ARE CURRENT

The RPPR does not ask for IRB and IACUC approval dates. If the research involves vertebrate animals or human subjects, it is an institutional responsibility to follow Federal regulations and ensure that the reviews have been conducted. Some institutions have very sophisticated systems to ensure necessary reviews are done on time; others do not. There is no time like the RPPR to make certain these requirements are up to

date. Some additional relevant questions for human subject research and vertebrate animal requirements include:

* + **CHANGES WITH VERTEBRATE ANIMALS OR HUMAN SUBJECTS:** Have there been changes involving research with live vertebrate animals or with human subjects? NIH prior approval is required depending on the nature of the change, that is, changes in objective and scope. Remember that a change in human subjects protocol that presents increased risk to human subjects also requires IC prior approval, even if the change does not constitute a change of scope.
  + **HUMAN SUBJECTS SYSTEM CURRENT:** Is the Human Subjects System current for NIH‐defined clinical research? The PI accesses the Human Subjects System in the eRA Commons, and data entry should be current at the time of submission or shortly thereafter. If data entry in this system is not up to date when the RPPR is reviewed, the IC will typically delay award until the entry is current.
  + **CLINICAL TRIALS.GOV:** If this grant is a clinical trial, are any submissions outstanding for Clinical Trials.gov? To prevent delays in the next year’s award, missing submissions should be caught up as soon possible. If entry in this system is not up to date when the RPPR is reviewed, the IC will likely delay award until the entry is current.

If a particular IRB or IACUC approval has expired or is currently under review, it is acceptable and reasonable to describe the in‐process situation. The IC will likely double‐check with the institution prior to award to confirm there are no issues.

## IDENTIFY ANY NEW INDIVIDUALS BEING ADDED TO THE PROJECT

This information is essential for **Section** D. For each new individual being added to a grant:

* + **CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURES ON FILE** If Key Personnel make sure they have Conflict of Interest disclosures on file and that your institution’s COI guidelines are being followed.
  + **SPECIAL TRAINING UP TO DATE** If your institution or the grant requires any annual or special training—for example, responsible conduct of research—confirm that new personnel have completed.
  + **HUMAN SUBJECTS EDUCATION REQUIREMENT** Are any new personnel involved in the design and/or conduct of human subjects research? If so, have they completed the Human Subjects Education Requirement? Confirmation of that requirement needs to be included in Section G.5 of the RPPR.
  + **POST DOCS AND GRAD STUDENTS:** Ensure that each post doc and grad student working one calendar month or more has a Commons ID and has completed their Profile.
  + **NEW SENIOR/KEY PERSONNEL:** A Biosketch and Other Support are required for any new senior/key personnel added to the grant. In addition, from January 25, 2022 forward, eRA Commons credentials are now required for these individuals.

Ideally, most of these steps occur at the time new individuals are added to work on a particular grant, but the RPPR is the perfect opportunity to make sure nothing is outstanding. Remember, problems with grants or delays in award are more often caused by errors of omission rather than sins of commission.

## REVIEW THE MOST CURRENT BUDGET AND EXPENDITURE INFORMATION TO DETERMINE THE UNOBLIGATED BALANCE AT THE END OF THE CURRENT BUDGET PERIOD.

As detailed in Section 8.3.1 of the NIH Grant Policy Statement, NIH has the expectation that

[r]ecipients must have in place accounting and internal control systems that provide for appropriate monitoring of grant accounts to ensure that obligations and expenditures are reasonable, allocable, and allowable. In addition, the systems must be able to identify large unobligated balances, accelerated expenditures, inappropriate cost transfers, and other inappropriate obligation and expenditure of funds. Recipients must notify NIH when problems are identified.

A recipient's failure to establish adequate control systems constitutes a material violation of the terms of the award. Under these circumstances, NIH may include specific conditions on awards or take any of the range of actions specified in *Administrative Requirements‐ Enforcement Actions*, as necessary and appropriate.

Ideally, the budget and expenditures of a grant are being tracked regularly throughout the grant…both by the PI and the research administrator. When this happens there are no surprises at the time of the RPPR. The RPPR specifically asks “Is it anticipated that an estimated unobligated balance (including prior year carryover) will be greater than 25% of the current year’s total approved budget?” If the question is answered YES, the recipient asked to provide

* + the estimated unobligated balance
  + an explanation of how the balance occurred
  + and (if the grant is under automatic carryover) a general description of how it is anticipated that the funds will be spent. An answer is still required when there isn’t automatic carryover mentioning that an official request will be submitted after the FFR is filed.

If the grant is not under automatic carryover, a separate prior approval request for carryover of funds will be required. The carryover request is typically submitted after the FFR for the current budget period has been submitted by the institution. From an NIH perspective, an unobligated balance means one of three things: either

* + - the project is behind and the money will be needed to complete the research. This situation is not uncommon, especially after the first year of a grant.
    - the grant has unresolved accounting matters…for example delayed invoicing of a consortium or a missing drawdown of funds, OR
    - for various reasons, the grant has more money than needed to complete the research.

For a given grant under automatic carryover, the circumstances and processes under which each IC follows a grant’s budget during a competitive segment varies broadly by the size and complexity of the grant and by the particular IC. For example, it is more likely that a $700,000 annual direct cost R01 grant might be monitored more closely that a small R03 grant. When an IC does check on current funds, the most common way an IC checks is to look at the Payment Management System, which provides bottom line drawdowns by the institution, not individual expenditures for the grant. Even taking normal delays in

drawdowns into consideration, NIH staff generally know that looking at the Payment Management System is a bit like looking at the online balance of a bank account…the total amount showing may be relatively current or it may be missing the single large invoice payment that will not be apparent until the next drawdown. An IC will be most concerned and likely to take action when the response to G.10 is misaligned with the grant award and the grant progress reported in the RPPR. Let’s look at three examples.

A common anecdote related by grants specialists is a large balance reported after the first year of the grant explained and justified by delays in hiring a postdoc or other staff. At the time of the second RPPR, research progress is on track, the proportion of the unobligated balance has continued to grow, and yet the exact same explanation is presented without a viable solution of how the funds are going to be used. Good progress has happened without hiring the postdoc?

Does that mean the money originally budgeted for the postdoc is not going to be needed?

Another example is the clinical research grant with very slow recruitment. Before funding the third year of the grant, the RPPR reports only 14% of the participants have been recruited and explains the project is “behind”. The specialist checks the Payment Management System and determines that the grant appears to be almost fully expensed. If the grant is behind recruiting human subjects, what are the funds being spent on?

One NIH Grant Specialist tells the story of spot checking the Payment Management System before funding the fourth year of a five‐year modular grant. The answer to the G.10 question of the RPPR on an anticipated budget over 25% was “no”. When the specialist checked they found that none of the Year 3 funds had been spent and furthermore a significant portion of the Year 2 funds were unspent. That means the unobligated balance was well over 100%. Is research on track? In the absence of a recognition of the large balance with an explanation, how can the IC justify providing the fourth year of funding?

Each of these situations presents multiple issues with incomplete information, requiring the NIH grants specialist to ask more questions of the recipient and the PI. Depending on your working relationship with a PI, your institution’s processes and procedures, and the time and resources you have available, these scenarios might seem somewhere between “no chance I could help” and “where would I begin?”. Here are some steps and actions that should be taken to address a grant’s unobligated balance

* + Using current research accounting information, estimate the funds that will be available at the end of the current budget period. Be sure to account for expenditures that will occur in the time intervening between your review and the end of the budget period…both recurring expenditures (like salaries or monthly animal care charges) and irregular or periodic expenditures (like an equipment or consortium invoice). Remember this is a best estimate, not an amount to be audited to the penny. Then determine what proportion the unobligated amount will be of the current year’s total approved budget. Remember, the total approved budget amount includes current year and any carryover from prior years of the project period. Let’s be clear about this point by walking through the simplistic example of a four‐year, $100,000 per year budget. In years 1‐3, the expenditures actually only total $75,000 each year. In this example, by the time the RPPR would go in before the 4th year the grant would have a 50% unobligated balance. A 50% unobligated balance might seem alarming, but it is not an issue if the RPPR explains why the balance has occurred and the plans for using those funds.

Year 1 Year 2 Year 3

|  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- |
| total current year budget | 100,000 | 125,000 | 150,000 |
| expenditures | 75,000 | 75,000 | 75,000 |
| unobligated balance | 25,000 | 50,000 | 75,000 |
| % unobligated | 25% | 40% | 50% |

* + Discuss the balance with the PI. Depending on the experience and savviness of the PI and the regularity with which the account is monitored, they may be surprised or concerned about the balance in a way that warrants further follow‐up…for example, an incorrect charge placed on the grant. Remember that a grant may have the planned commitment of a consortium, but until an invoice is presented, no actual obligation exists…the money is still unobligated. NIH staff generally appreciate that research and accompanying expenditures may be episodic, especially when human subjects or consortia are involved. Upfront explanations by the grantee avoids unnecessary questions and delays.
  + If there is an unobligated balance that needs to be explained, work with the PI so that the explanation and justification make sense. Cutting and pasting last year’s explanation and justification, especially when scientific progress is good, may suggest that funds are not needed. And ensure that the explanation/justification of a large balance isn’t merely “funds will be used for a no‐cost extension.” The *NIH Grant Policy Statement* explicitly states “The fact that funds remain at the completion date of the grant is not, in itself, sufficient justification for an extension without additional funds.” Complete the thought, describing in as few as 1‐2 sentences the additional research that needs to be completed.

Often a PI worries about acknowledging an unobligated balance…worried that the IC may take away funds. Again, among the 24 ICs there can be an apparent variability in both the reaction to and the action on unobligated balances, but “taking away funds” on a SNAP award is an uncommon event. Yet, if the IC calls into question a recipient’s response to **Section G.10** in the RPPR—particularly when the RPPR indicates no balance and the Payment Management System indicates a large balance—at a minimum, significant delays in the pending award will occur. Getting this information right the first time, protects the institution and the grant, and will often save the most important limited resource…time.

A serious challenge for the research administrator is when to answer YES versus NO to **Section G.10**. There are times when the administrator has a realistic estimate that they believe the grant is under 25%, but based on current drawdowns (whether it be a consortium still hasn’t been fully executed, large initial consortium invoices are forthcoming, or perhaps effort adjustments were just discovered during RPPR prep and are still in process) the research administrator knows that NIH is probably seeing a much different picture. in some of these situations it's not about the estimated unobligated balance being 26%: using the Payment Management System it might appear to the IC as 60%. The RPPR does not allow the preparer to say **NO** and provide additional explanation about in process invoices. The research administrator has two options...both equally valid. The first option is to answer NO. If NIH looks at its records and sees something very different...let's say a projected 50% balance...the IC often will put on the breaks and ask additional questions. The second option is to answer YES and provide an explanation....e.g, We have just received our first invoice ($187,234) for the Wossamotta University subaward which represents 42% of the first year consortium budget costs. With this obligation we estimate our unobligated balance to be at $652,000

which is less than 25% of the current year budget. With this explanation you may or may not get additional questions: the grants specialist may (rightly) even ask why you said "yes." Research administrators strive to not have to revisit/re‐aquaint themselves with the particulars of a given grant, and different institutions have differing philosophies on how to respond. NIH specialists will tell you that clarity works. Regardless of answering YES or NO, you want the specific explanation for current unobligated balance—be it actual or apparent‐‐stored away in your Summary Sheet, ready to respond should the NIH ask questions.

# Preparation of the RPPR

Now let’s talk about the actual preparation and requirements for the RPPR document. Just as with the original application, both Adobe reader and PDF generator software is required to prepare the RPPR. All documents attached to the progress report must use PDF format, submitted as individual files.

The standard instructions presented in NIH RPPR Instruction Guide apply for the annual RPPR for an R01 grant and almost 30 other activity codes: (parenthetical activity codes presented here to be displayed, not read)

(D71, DP1, DP5, G08, G11, G13, P40, R00, R01, R03, R18, R21, R33, R34, R36, R37, R56, RC1, RC2, RL1, S21, S22, SC1, SC2, SC3, U1B, UC2, UH1, UH2, UH3)

Other grant mechanisms have supplemental instructions included in Chapter 7 of the **RPPR Instruction Guide** that either replace or are in addition to the basic instructions **and must be followed**. This includes:

* + Individual Career Development Awards, which includes most but not all “K” awards (K01, K02, K05, K06, K07, K08, K18, K22, K23, K24, K25, K26, K99, KL1)
  + Fellowship Awards, which includes all “F” awards (F05, F30, F31, F32, F33)
  + Small Business (SBIR and STTR) Awards (R41, R42, R43, R44, U43, U44, UT1, UT2)
  + Training Awards, which includes institutional “K” awards, most “T” awards and some specialized R‐ series training awards (K12, KL2, R90, RL9, T15, T32, T34, T35, T37, T90, TL1)
  + Education Awards (D43, DP7, K30, R13, R25, RL5, T14, T36, U13, U2R)
  + and Multi‐Project Awards and Single Project Awards with Complicated Structure (G12, R34, M01, P01, P20, P2C, P30, P41, P42, P50, P51, P60, PL1, PM1, PN1, PN2, R24, R28, RM1, S06, S11, U01, U10, U19, U24, U2C, U34, U41, U42, U45, U54, U56, UC7, UL1, UM1, UM2). If any of these grant activity codes are issued under SNAP, the standard instructions apply.

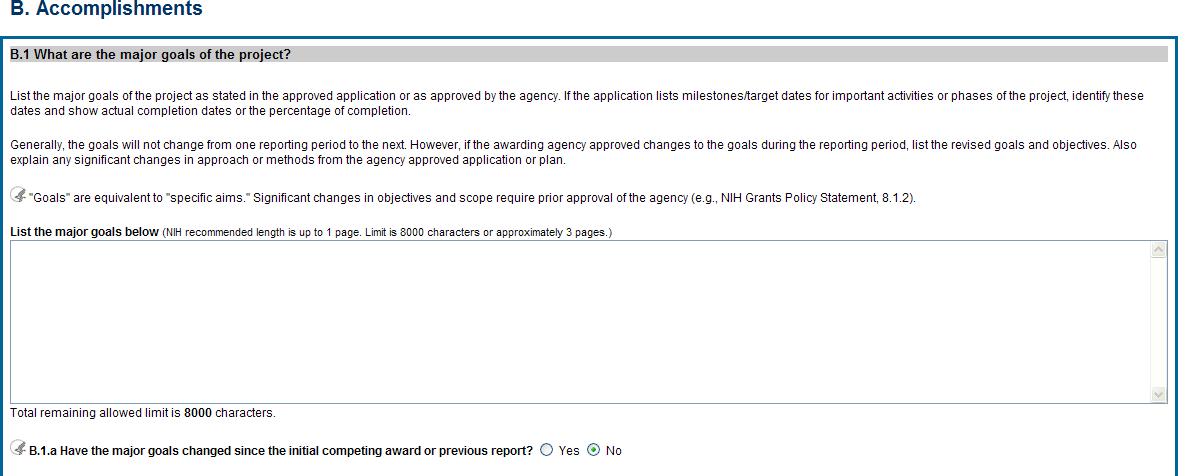
To start the RPPR, the PI (or the delegate they have assigned) begins by clicking on the RPPR tab and clicking on the hyperlink of the appropriate grant number or from the Status screen to open the RPPR menu page. The RPPR menu screen has eight links: initiate, edit, check for errors, view, view routing history, route, recall and submit. Clicking “Initiate”, followed by opening the “Edit” tab allows the preparer to work on each of eight section screens:

1. Cover Page
2. Accomplishments
3. Products
4. Participants
5. Impact
6. Changes
7. Special Reporting Requirements
8. Budget

The sections do not need to be completed in order; however, the preparer must be sure to click the “save” button within each section before closing. Navigating away from any RPPR page without selecting “save” results in the loss of any information entered subsequent to the last save.



Generally, the institution will not signoff on the RPPR and the eRA Commons will not allow RPPR submission if there are errors. It is prudent to catch missing information and errors for each section as it is completed or even as the section is in process. This is done by clicking **Check for Errors** on the RPPR Menu. Frequent validation checks ensure a more accurate and complete RPPR document and avoids the situation where the signing official returns the RPPR to the PI before submission for corrections. The system also provides warnings for some missing or incomplete information. Warnings will not prevent an RPPR from being submitted, but may cause problems and delays with NIH review of the RPPR. (Error checks and warnings for multi‐project RPPRs differ from single‐project RPPRs. Consult with the RPPR Instruction Guide for details.)



While most text boxes have an 8000 character (3 page) limit (standardized across federal agencies using the RPPR), NIH typically recommends no more than one page, approximately 2800 characters for most boxes. Each text box provides a “countdown’ of remaining characters. PDF File attachments do not have page limits, but they may not be more than 6 MB. To avoid system errors, save all PDF attachments as individual (not bundled) files with file attachment names limited to no more than 50 characters (only A‐Z, a‐z, 0‐9, and underscore), with no special characters or spacing.

We will now step through the eight sections of the RPPR. Most of what is presented are the questions and/or prompts just as they appear in the online RPPR and described in the ***RPPR Instruction Guide***. You may also want to refer to the screen shots of the R01‐like RPPR (https://grants.nih.gov/grants/rppr/rppr\_screen\_shots.pdf). This will allow you to have a complete view of what is needed to complete the RPPR, even if some sections will be completely handled by the PI. Remember, that you and the PI will need to refer to the supplemental instructions for award specific requirements if the RPPR is for an Individual Career Development Award, a Fellowship, an SBIR or STTR award, a Training Award, an Education Awards, or a Multi‐Project Award/Single Project Award with Complicated Structure issued outside of SNAP. We will describe what is required in each section. In many sections, the PI or preparer may select **Nothing to Report** as a response.

**Section A, Cover Page** includes information about the award, most of which is pre‐populated from eRA system data. If contact information has changed for the PI or the institution since the prior submission, needed changes must be completed and saved in the Commons Profile. Early review of the Cover Page can prevent last minute issues.

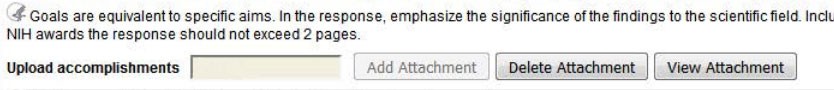
**Section B, ACCOMPLISHMENTS** allows the IC to assess whether satisfactory progress has been made during the reporting period:

* 1. ***What are the major goals of the project*?** Goals are the same as Specific Aims. List the major goals of the project as stated in the approved application or as approved by the IC. If the application lists milestones or target dates for important activities or phases of the project, identify these dates and show actual completion dates or the percentage of completion. Generally, the goals will not change from one reporting period to the next; however, if the IC approved changes to the goals during the reporting period, list the revised goals and objectives. Also explain any significant changes in approach or methods from the agency approved application or plan.

The Specific Aims must be entered into the text box for the initial RPPR (i.e., first non‐competing type 5 submission for the competitive segment). NIH generally expects the Specific Aims to come directly from the application or as amended through negotiation prior to award, typically presented as a term and condition in the Notice of Award. In subsequent RPPRs this section will pre‐populate with the aims/goals previously entered and only may be amended by answering Yes to question B.1.a.

***B.1.a Have the major goals changed since the initial competing award or previous report?*** If the preparer checks YES, the revised Specific Aims can be entered. Remember that written prior approval from the IC grants official is required for a change of scope in the project or its direction (NIH Grants Policy Statement, 8.1.2.5). The RPPR is not an appropriate vehicle to request approval for changes that have already occurred. The system does not validate whether or not prior approval has been obtained; however, the Program Officer and Grants Specialist WILL know.

* 1. ***What was accomplished under these goals?*** For this reporting period describe: 1) major activities; 2) specific objectives; 3) significant results, including major findings, developments, or conclusions (both positive and negative); and 4) key outcomes or other achievements. Include a discussion of stated goals not met. As the project progresses, the emphasis in reporting in this section should shift from reporting activities to reporting accomplishments. Goals are equivalent to specific aims. In the response, emphasize the significance of the findings to the scientific field. For most NIH awards the response should not exceed 2 pages, and the preparer must upload the PDF attachments.



***B. 3 Competitive Revisions/Administrative Supplements. For this reporting period, is there one or more Revision/Supplement associated with this award for which reporting is required?*** If yes, identify the Revision(s)/Supplements(s) by grant number (e.g., 3R01CA098765‐01S1) or title and describe the

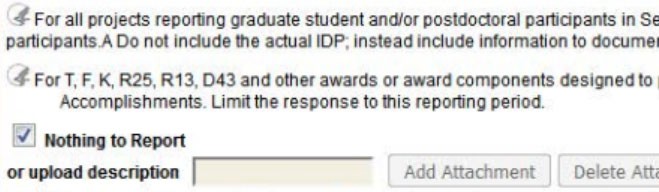
specific aims and accomplishments for each Revision/Supplement funded during this reporting period. Include any supplements to promote diversity or re‐entry, or other similar supplements to support addition of an individual or a discrete project.

If the preparer checks YES entry in the text box is required. The Notice of Award for the supplement will indicate any special reporting requirements. Be advised that the NoA incorporates requirements of the FOA which may also include reporting requirements.

* 1. ***What opportunities for training and professional development has the project provided?*** If the research is not intended to provide training and professional development opportunities or there is nothing significant to report during the reporting period, select **Nothing to Report**. Describe opportunities for training and professional development provided to anyone who worked on the project or anyone who was involved in the activities supported by the project. Training activities are those in which individuals with advanced professional skills and experience assist others in attaining greater proficiency. Training activities may include, for example, courses or one‐on‐one work with a mentor. Professional development activities result in increased knowledge or skill in one’s area of expertise and may include workshops, conferences, seminars, study groups, and individual study. Include participation in conferences, workshops, and seminars not listed under major activities.

A response is specifically required for T, F, K, R25, R13, D43, and other awards or award component designed to provide training and professional development activities. The preparer is prompted to not reiterate what is reported under Accomplishments and to limit the response to the current reporting period. Any report is uploaded as a PDF attachment.

If the project will report graduate students or postdocs in Section D of the RPPR, this section must describe whether this institution has established Individual Development Plans, describing how they are used (if used) to help manage training for those individuals. IDPs are not required by NIH, but are strongly encouraged. Actual IDPs should not be included, instead include information to document how IDPs are used to help manage the training for those individuals. If IDPs are not used that should be stated. If postdocs and graduate students are included in Section D, but the description here in this section is lacking, NIH frequently will request the missing information. To readily address this question, effective research administrators often have boilerplate responses for the different situations.



* 1. ***How have results been disseminated to communities of interest?*** Only awards or award components designed to disseminate information require a detailed response, which is provided in a text box. A response is not required for the majority of awards and the preparer selects **Nothing to Report**. For research grants, PIs will typically indicate the national and/or international meetings at which they presented research results. Reporting the routine dissemination of information (e.g., websites, press releases) is not required. Note that scientific publications and the sharing of research resources will be *reported under* ***Section C. Products****.*
  2. ***What do you plan to do for the next reporting period to accomplish the goals?*** Describe briefly what you plan to do during the next reporting period to accomplish the goals and objectives. Discuss efforts to ensure that the approach is scientifically rigorous and results are robust and unbiased. Remember that

significant changes in objectives and scope require prior approval of the agency. Include any important modifications to the original plans. Provide a scientific justification for any changes involving research with human subjects or vertebrate animals. A detailed description of such changes must be provided under ***Section F. Changes***. The PI routinely prepares this text box section.

Rigor & Reproducibility (aka Rigor and Transparency) guidelines require a discussion of these concepts in this section. Many Program Officers scrutinize the RPPR for this information and may ask questions if they believe the information is lacking. A simple solution is for the PI to include this specific information in a short paragraph within this section with the heading “Rigor and Reproducibility”.

**Section C PRODUCTS** allows the IC to assess and report publications and other products to Congress and the public.

* 1. ***Publications. Are there publications or manuscripts accepted for publication in a journal or other publication (e.g., book, one‐time publication, monograph, preprint) during the reporting period resulting directly from the award?*** A publication must be reported in section C.1 if the publication was accepted for publication or made public during the reporting period AND the publication directly arises from the award (e.g., the award supported personnel activity that contributed to the publication, such as authorship and conducting analyses reported in the publication). If only non‐personnel resources (e.g., supplies, equipment, data) are the only contribution to a publication, the award should not be listed in section C. Publications listed in other parts of the RPPR will not be tracked.

A **YES** response permits the preparer to associate publications in the PI’s My NCBI account with the current grant, as appropriate. NIH‐funded investigators are required by Federal law to submit (or have submitted for them) to PubMed Central (PMC) an electronic version of the final, peer‐reviewed manuscript upon acceptance for publication, to be made publicly available no later than 12 months after the official date of publication. Compliant publications received a PMCID which demonstrates compliance. Publications that fall under the NIH Public Access Policy and are noncompliant still must be reported.

When non‐compliant publications are reported, eRA generates an automated email to the PI (with cc to the AO and SO) for follow‐up. As it takes weeks to bring publications into compliance, advise your PI to update information in My NCBI as soon as possible as the grant award will be delayed or awarded fully restricted until all publications are compliant. It does not hurt to confirm with the PI a month or two before the deadline that publication submissions to Pub Med are current. If you are working with a new NIH investigator, you may need to introduce them to the requirements and have established an My NCBI account. More information can be found at [http://publicaccess.nih.gov.](http://publicaccess.nih.gov/)

* 1. ***Website(s) or other internet site(s).*** A response is required for awards designed to create or maintain one or more websites. List the URL for any Internet site(s) that disseminates the results of the research activities. A short description of each site should be provided. For the majority of awards, which are not designed to create or maintain websites, select **Nothing to Report**.
  2. ***Technologies or techniques.*** Identify technologies or techniques that have resulted from the research activities. Describe the technologies or techniques and how they are being shared.

PIs are required to report all technologies or techniques that arise from their NIH award in the current reporting period. To report, select “YES” and enter a short description. After entering a description for one or more items in a text box, you then select appropriate categories using the scrollable menu. You are not

limited to a single menu category per product. If there are no technologies or techniques to report, the preparer selects **Nothing to Report**.

* 1. ***Inventions, patent applications and/or licenses. Have inventions, patent applications and/or licenses resulted from the award during this reporting period? If yes, has this information been previously provided?*** Reporting of inventions through iEdison is strongly encouraged. Know how your institution addresses intellectual property. If the RPPR reports “no” and an invention is evident, NIH may ask questions.
  2. **Other products and resource sharing.** Describe the product and how it is available to be shared with the research community. Do not repeat information provided above. Limit the response to this reporting period.

***C.5a Other Products*.** Report any products not covered in Sections C1‐C4.

***C.5b Resource Sharing.*** PIs and recipient organizations are expected to make the results and accomplishments of their activities available to the research community and to the public at large. If the initial research plan addressed (or the terms of award require) a formal plan for sharing final research data, model organisms, Genome Wide Association Studies data, or other such project‐specific data, this section must describe the progress in implementing that plan. A common mistake is **Section C.5b** being marked **Nothing to Report** when a status update of resource sharing plan or other sharing plan is required. When this section is required, the IC will likely delay award or place a restriction on the Notice of Award until this information is provided.

**Section D PARTICIPANTS** allows the IC to know who has worked on the project to help assess progress and performance.

* 1. ***What individuals have worked on the project?*** Provide or update the information for: (1) program director(s)/principal investigator(s) (PDs/PIs); and (2) each person who has worked at least one person month per year on the project during the reporting period, regardless of the source of compensation.

This is a **retrospective** section, documenting what has taken place during the current budget year/reporting period. An individual’s Commons user ID may be used to partially populate their information. Important things to remember for this section include:

* + - A Commons ID is required for all individuals with a postdoctoral, graduate or undergraduate role. The Commons user IDs also required for individuals supported by a Reentry or Diversity Supplement. After January 25, 2022 all senior‐key personnel are required to have Commons user ID. Missing IDs will generate errors at submission.
    - Individuals with 0 calendar months of effort, including Other Significant Contributors should NOT be reported.
    - Personnel for whom a PHS 2271 Appointment form has been submitted (i.e., for a training (T) or fellowship (F) award) should NOT be reported. This is an “exception” to the statement “Provide information for each person who has worked at least one person month…regardless of the source of compensation
    - Do not overlook the question, “Is the individual’s primary affiliation with a foreign organization?”
  1. ***Personnel Updates*** Incomplete or incorrect responses to items in D.2 frequently cause additional question by NIH and delay the award.
     1. ***Will there be, in the next budget period, either (1) a reduction of 25% or more in the level of effort from what was approved by the agency for the PI(s) or other senior/key personnel designated in the Notice of Award, or (2) a reduction in level of effort below the minimum amount of effort required by the Notice of Award.*** This is a Yes‐No question. Reductions are cumulative, i.e., the 25% threshold may be reached by two or more successive reductions that total 25% or more. Once agency approval has been given for a significant change in the level of effort, then all subsequent reductions are measured against the approved adjusted level. Selecting Yes constitutes a prior approval request to the agency and the issuance of a subsequent year of funding constitutes agency approval of the request. The effort from the original application (or Notice of Award if amended) continues to be the point of reference for this question, UNTIL an official request is made and approval granted by the NIH.
     2. ***Are there, or will there be, new senior/key personnel?*** If YES is selected, a biosketch (directions in the competing application guide) and active other support must be provided for each individual. As always, if an individual has no active other support a statement to that fact must be included. If there are multiple new senior/key personnel, combine all biosketches and other support into a single PDF. Missing biosketches and/or Other Support information will delay the award.
     3. ***Changes in other support. Has there been a change in the active support of senior/key personnel since the last reporting period.*** Select **Yes** only if active support has changed for the PI(s) or senior/key personnel. If yes, upload active other support for senior/key personnel whose support has changed and indicate what the change has been. List the award for which the progress report is being submitted and include the effort that will be devoted in the next reporting period. If a previously active grant has terminated and/or if a previously pending grant is now active, submit complete Other Support information using the suggested format and instructions found at <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/2590/Non>‐ competing\_othersupport.docx.

Probably no section in the RPPR causes more issues for the institution and more questions by the NIH than Other Support (also referred to as Current and Pending Support). Attention to detail by the research administrator is critical. Other Support is required for all Senior/Key Personnel as Just‐in‐Time at the time of the competing award and changes must reported in each RPPR. Other Support should include:

* + - * A list of all positions and scientific appointments both domestic and foreign held by senior/key personnel that are relevant to their science, including affiliations with foreign entities or governments. Titled academic, professional, or institutional appointments should be included, whether or not remuneration is received and whether full-time, part-time, or voluntary (including adjunct, visiting, or honorary).
      * Prospective effort for the next year of the current grant which may differ from the current active effort
      * *All* resources—domestic and foreign—made available in support of a researcher’s research endeavors and ongoing research projects, including
        + Consulting agreements where person will be conducting research as part of the activities;
        + In‐kind contributions (for example, space equipment, students) supported by an outside source; and
        + Financial support for laboratory personnel and other high‐value materials. Institutional resources such as core facilities is not considered Other Support and should still be listed under Facilities and Other Resources

Other support does not include training awards, prizes and gifts.

When the NIH Program and Grants Management reviews Other Support they check to see

* + - * All resources, domestic or foreign, directly supporting the individual’s research endeavors have been reported
      * Adequate levels of effort are committed to the project
      * There is no scientific, budgetary, or commitment overlap
      * Only funds necessary to the approved project are included in the award
      * Any foreign resources that meet the definition of a foreign component have received appropriate prior approval.

Beginning in 2018, a number of high‐profile events of scientists providing incomplete information related to other support, financial conflicts of interest, and foreign components brought increased scrutiny to the subject of Other Support across federal agencies. NIH Guide Notice [NOT‐OD‐19‐114](https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-OD-19-114.html) outlines policy reminders and points to recent format changes to the Biosketch and Other Support. A researcher’s signature is now required on Other Support submissions. Furthermore, for all foreign activities and resources that are reported in Other Support, institutions also are required to submit copies of contracts specific to senior/key personnel foreign appointments and/or employment with a foreign institution. If not in English, a translated copy must be provided. You should check with your sponsored research office, as different institutions have varied ways of implementing Other Support requirements.

Other support must be provided separately for an individual senior/key person. Based on NIH materials, one could list everything together with status of support listed for each grant, but the most practical presentation for both institutional and NIH separately lists Active, Pending, and In‐Kind support. A best practice format is (with required field marked with an \*):

ACTIVE SUPPORT:

### \*The Complete Title of the Funded Project

**Major Goals**: *A 1‐2 sentence description of the goals/objectives of the research*

**Grant/Contract Number** (sponsor number NOT institution number)*: e.g., R01 CA 123456*

***\**Name of PD/PI**: *John Smith*

**\*Source of Support:** agency, institute, foundation, or other organization that is providing the support. Include domestic, foreign, institutional, federal, public, and private sources of support*. If NIH, give the specific IC, e.g., NCI.*

**\*Primary Place of Performance:** primary location where the project is being executed*, e.g., Duke University.*

**\*Project/Proposal Start and End Dates (MM/YYYY):** *Indicate the inclusive dates of the project/activity as approved/proposed. In the case of NIH support, provide the dates of the approved/proposed competitive segment. For in‐kind contributions, provide project dates when applicable.*

**\*Total Award Amount:** *For active projects, provide the total award costs for the period of performance, including indirect costs. For example, in the case of NIH support, provide the total*

*award costs for the competitive segment. For a pending project, provide the proposed total costs for the period of performance.*

**\*Person Months:** *For an active project, provide the level of actual effort in person months (even if unsalaried) for the current budget period and indicate the proposed level effort for each remaining budget period. Indicate calendar (CM) or academic (AM)/summer months (SM) associated with each project for each year. The example below presents the year of the grant (5, 6, 7…), the fiscal year of the grant (2022) and the calendar months effort. From NIH’s reference, the person months listed for each year will be the same as proposed in the awarded application, unless a different level of effort was negotiated at the time of the competing award OR if the NIH IC provided prior approval for a reduction in effort.*

|  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- |
| Year | | Person Months |
| 5 | 2022 | 3.6 CM |
| 6 | 2023 | 3.6 CM |
| 7 | 2024 | 3.6 CM |
| 8 | 2025 | 3.6 CM |
| 9 | 2026 | 3.6 CM |

For a pending project, indicate the level of effort in person months as proposed for each budget period, using either calendar months OR a combination of academic and summer months, as appropriate.

For in‐kind contributions, a summary of each in‐kind contribution must be provided, along with an estimate for the value of the contribution. If the time commitment or dollar value is not readily determined, a reasonable estimate should be provided. While the Major Goals and Grant/Contract number are not specifically required, their presence expedites Other Support review for both the institution and the NIH.

After listing all support, describe any potential overlap for each individual with their active or pending projects and activities, other positions, affiliations, and resources and this application in terms of the science, budget, or an individual’s committed effort. If there is no overlap, state no overlap. Failure to appropriately identify scientific and/or budgetary overlap can result in a loss of funding up to and including repayment of previously awarded grant funds.

NIH understands that other support can be fluid with grants starting and ending throughout the year; nonetheless, NIH requires that 1) changes in other support are reported at the time of the RPPR and 2) that prior approval is obtained before a reduction in effort of 25 percent or more from the level that was approved at the time of the initial competing award—e.g., a change from 4.8 calendar months to 3.6 calendar months or less. It is important to remember that reductions are cumulative—i.e., the 25 percent threshold may be reached by two successive reductions.

NIH also now requires immediate notification of undisclosed other support. When a recipient organization discovers that a PI or other Senior/Key personnel on an active NIH grant failed to disclose Other Support information outside the RPPR (or Just‐in‐Time), the recipient must submit updated Other Support to the Grants Management Specialist named in the Notice of Award upon discovery.

As Other Support is a critical task for the research administrator, here are some helpful tips in preparing Other Support for the RPPR:

* + - * Include all collaboration and affiliations that provide funding or require a commitment of time, whether foreign or domestic.
      * Include any and all activity that provides funding or requires a commitment of time as part of the researcher’s appointment, excluding teaching and administration. In addition to Federal and Nonfederal sponsored projects this should include awards from internally‐funded competitions. Do not include training awards, prizes, gifts. NIH has indicated that this funding does NOT include start‐up or retention packages provided by the institution.
      * When the researcher works on a subaward to a grant that is awarded to another institution, provide the project number, PD/PI name for the prime award. All other information, including the total award amount and person months, should be specific to the subaward.
      * Consulting activities should clearly be identified as such. Typically, the activities should be estimates for the total amount paid rather than time and effort in calendar months.
      * Include projects with no‐cost extensions, clearly indicating that the project is in no‐cost extension. Remember active awards must have a measurable level of effort; however, that with the exception of grant programs that have an effort requirement (e.g., a K‐award) or where terms and conditions prohibit such reductions, for the no‐cost extension NIH does not require prior approval for the reduction in effort for Senior/Key personnel named in the NOA.
      * Relative to the prior submission, update information as much as possible, removing completed awards and outdated proposals.

When in doubt, recipients are advised to err on the side of disclosure. Accordingly, some institutions have implemented procedures that may be more restrictive that NIH requirements. You should consult with your institutional officials for guidance to ensure compliance with institutional and NIH policies.

* + 1. ***New other significant contributors. Are there, or will there be, new other significant contributors?*** Other significant contributors are individuals who have committed to contribute to the scientific development or execution of the project, but are not committing any specified measurable effort (i.e., person months) to the project. **If yes, upload biosketches for all new other significant contributors.** If there are multiple new significant contributors, combine all biosketches and other support into a single PDF. Missing biosketches and/or Other Support information will delay the award.
    2. ***Will there a change in the MPI Leadership Plan for the next budget period?*** If yes, upload a revised MPI Leadership Plan that includes a description of the change(s).

Revision of the Leadership Plan during the project period, including changing the Contact PI, may be reported in the RPPR. Prior approval of a change in the *MPI Leadership Plan* is ***not*** required. Prior approval ***is*** required for a change in status of the PI, including a request to change from a multiple PI model to a

single PI model or a change in the number or makeup of the PIs on a multiple PI award. Refer to Section 9 of the ***NIH Grants Policy Statement*** for detailed discussion of multiple PI awards.

**Section E** reports the ways certain research products will have had an impact during the reporting period.

* 1. ***What is the impact on the development of human resources***? This section applies to Education RPPRs. Refer to ***RPPR Instruction Guide*** Supplemental Instructions for specifics.
  2. ***What is the impact on physical, institutional, or information resources that form infrastructure?*** Describe ways the project made an impact on the aforementioned resources such as facilities, laboratories, establishment of societies, electronic means for accessing resources for scientific communication etc.

If the award or award component(s) is not intended to support physical, institutional, or information resources that form infrastructure, select **Nothing to Report**.

* 1. ***What is the impact on technology transfer?*** This section applies to SBIR/STTR RPPRs. Refer to ***RPPR Instruction Guide*** Supplemental Instructions for specifics.
  2. ***What dollar amount of the award’s budget is being spent in foreign country(ies)?*** For domestic awardees provide the dollar amount obligated to first‐tier subawards to foreign entities for this reporting period. For foreign awardees provide the dollar amount of the award, excluding all first‐tier subawards to

U.S. entities. Dollars should reflect total costs. If more than one foreign country is involved, identify the distribution among the foreign countries. Do not report foreign travel or for purchasing materials, equipment, and service agreements, unless part of a first‐tier subaward to a foreign country. If no funds are being spent in foreign countries, select **Nothing to Report**.

**Section F Changes** addresses all actual or proposed changes for the grant. Remember that significant changes in objectives and scope require prior approval of the agency before the changes are initiated (refer to Section 8.1.2.5 of the ***NIH Grants Policy Statement***).

* 1. ***Changes in Approach and Reasons for Change.*** This section applies to Education RPPRs. Refer to ***RPPR Instruction Guide*** Supplemental Instructions for specifics.
  2. ***Actual or anticipated challenges or delays and actions or plans to resolve them.*** Describe only significant challenges that may impede the research (e.g., accrual of patients, hiring of personnel, need for resources or research tools) and emphasize their resolution. The response is entered into the text box, or if no changes or delays have been encountered selects **Nothing to Report.** The PI must take care not to cut‐ and‐paste this section from the previous RPPR. Program will delay the award until there is satisfactory resolution.
  3. ***Significant changes to human subjects, vertebrate animals, biohazards, and/or select agents.*** For each of these four topics, the preparer uploads a description of any significant deviations, unexpected outcomes, or changes in approved protocols during this reporting period. f no changes have been encountered, **No Change** is selected.
     1. ***Human Subjects*** If human subject studies are or will be different from the previous submission, include a description and explanation of how the studies differ and provide new or revised Protection of Human Subjects Section and Inclusion of Women, Minorities, and Children sections as described in the

competing application instructions. Additional or modified inclusion enrollment reports may also be necessary and should be provided by clicking the Human Subjects System (HSS) link in ***Section G.4.b*** of the RPPR to make necessary updates in the HSS).

### Vertebrate Animals

If there are or will be significant changes to the uses of vertebrate animals from the previous submission, provide a description of the changes. Examples of changes considered to be significant include, but are not limited to, changing animal species, changing from noninvasive to invasive procedures, new project/performance site(s) where animals will be used, etc. If studies involving live vertebrate animals are planned and were not part of the originally proposed research design, provide a new or revised Vertebrate Animal Section as described in the competing application instructions.

* + 1. ***Biohazards*** Describe and explain any changes from the previous submission.
    2. ***Select Agents*** If the possession, use, or transfer of Select Agents is or will be different from that proposed in the previous submission, including any change in the select agent research location and/or the required level of biocontainment, provide a description and explanation of the differences. Institutional approvals should be in place.

***Section G Special Reporting Requirements*** addresses any agency‐specific award terms and conditions, in addition to any award specific reporting requirements.

* 1. ***Special Notice of Award and Funding Opportunity Announcement Reporting Requirements*** Address with an attachment any special reporting requirements specified in the award terms and conditions in the Notice of Award (NoA) or Funding Opportunity Announcement (FOA). If nothing needs to be addressed select **Nothing to Report.**
  2. ***Responsible Conduct of Research*** This section is only required in Individual Career Development (K), Fellowship (F) and Training RPPRs. Refer to ***RPPR Instruction Guide*** Supplemental Instructions for specifics.

G.3**. Mentor’s Report or Sponsor Comments** This section is only required in Individual Career Development (K) and Fellowship (F) RPPRs. Refer to ***RPPR Instruction Guide*** Supplemental Instructions for specifics.

***G. 4 Human Subjects***

* + 1. ***Does the project involve human subjects?*** If activities involving human subjects are planned at any time during the next budget period at the grantee organization or at any other project/performance site or collaborating institution, select **YES**. Select **YES** even if the project is exempt from the Regulations for the Protection of Human Subjects. Select **NO** if activities involving human subjects are not planned at any time during the next budget period. Policy on research involving human subjects, including definitions, can be found in the ***NIH Grants Policy Statement*** or in the competing application instructions.
    2. ***Inclusion enrollment data*** If this grant conducts NIH‐defined clinical research, reporting the cumulative enrollment of subjects and the distribution by sex/gender, race, and ethnicity is required. Updates are made with the HSS link. Detailed reporting instructions are in the ***RPPR Instruction Guide***. The

RPPR should not be submitted until after HSS updates appear within the RPPR. Once the RPPR has been submitted, the inclusion data cannot be updated: the investigator will need to change the application status and resubmit. If the HSS data has not been updated or if it appears out of line with the RPPR, delays will occur, and the PI will be asked to update this data. If there are details or concerns related to inclusion enrollment progress, or if the cumulative enrollment data does not reflect the planned enrollment by sex/gender, race, and/or ethnicity, the reasons for this should be addressed in **Section F.3.a** of the RPPR. If your researchers are routinely involved in human subjects research, you may want to support them by becoming more familiar with inclusion enrollment data requirements and the HSS.

* + 1. ***Clinical Trials.gov Does this project include one or more applicable clinical trials that must be registered in ClinicalTrials.gov under FDAAA? If yes, provide the ClinicalTrials.gov identifier, NCT number (e.g., NCT00654321) for those trials.*** This question will not be applicable unless the answer to **G.4.a** is **YES.** If G.4.c is answered **YES** the preparer will additionally be asked ***If yes, is this an NIH defined Phase III Clinical Trial?*** More detailed information is available in the ***RPPR Instruction Guide.***
  1. ***Human Subjects Education Requirement Are there personnel on this project who are or will be newly involved in the design or conduct of human subjects research?*** If yes, provide the name of the individual, the title of the human subjects education program and a one‐sentence description of the program.
  2. ***Human Embryonic Stem Cells (hESCs)* Does this project involve human embryonic stem cells?** Only hESC lines listed as approved in the NIH Registry may be used in NIH funded research. If **YES**, select the Add/New button to identify the hESC Registration number from the NIH Registry. If there is a change in the use of hESCs, a brief explanation must be provided.
  3. **VERTEBRATE ANIMALS Does this project involve vertebrate animals?** The YES/NO answer should not conflict with prior described grant conditions.
  4. **Project/Performance Sites If there are changes to the project/performance site(s) displayed, edit as appropriate.** As appropriate, delete entries and/or select the Add/New button to add data to the table. If including a new Project/Performance Site where either human subjects or vertebrate animals will be involved, address the change under F.3.a or F.3.b, as appropriate. If a Project/Performance Site is engaged in research involving human subjects, the grantee organization is responsible for ensuring that the Project/Performance Site operates under an appropriate Federal Wide Assurance for the protection of human subjects and complies with 45 CFR Part 46 and other NIH human subject‐related policies described in Part II of the competing application instructions and the NIH Grants Policy Statement. For research involving live vertebrate animals, the grantee organization must ensure that all Project/Performance Sites hold OLAW‐approved Assurances. If the grantee organization does not have an animal program or facilities and the animal work will be conducted at an institution with an Assurance, the grantee must obtain an Assurance from OLAW prior to the involvement of vertebrate animals.
  5. **FOREIGN COMPONENT Provide the organization name, country, and description of each foreign component.** Foreign component is defined as significant scientific activity that was performed outside of the United States, either by the grantee or by a researcher employed by a foreign organization, whether or not grant funds were expended. The following grant‐related activities are significant and must be reported:
     + involvement of human subjects or research with live vertebrate animals;
     + extensive foreign travel by grantee project staff to collect data, or conduct surveys or sampling activities; or
     + any grantee activity that may have an impact on U.S. foreign policy.

Examples of other grant‐related activities that may be significant are:

* + - collaborations with investigators at a foreign site anticipated to result in co‐authorship;
    - use of facilities or instrumentation at a foreign site; or
    - receipt of financial support or resources from a foreign entity.

Foreign travel for consultation does not meet the definition of foreign component. If there is no foreign component, check **No foreign component.** Remember that adding a foreign component requires NIH prior approval (NIH Grants Policy Statement Section 8.1.2.10).

* 1. **ESTIMATED UNOBLIGATED BALANCE**
     1. ***Is it anticipated that an estimated unobligated balance (including prior year carryover) will be greater than 25% of the current year’s total approved budget?*** If **YES** is checked additional information is required, including an estimate of the unobligated balance.
     2. ***Provide an explanation for unobligated balance.*** Following the module’s previous discussion about unobligated balance, briefly describe how this balance occurred. If you use the same explanation as the previous RPPR, more explanation is needed, i.e., avoid simply cutting‐and‐pasting.
     3. ***If authorized to carryover the balance, provide a general description of how it is anticipated that the funds will be spent. To determine carryover authorization, see the Notice of Award.*** The explanation for how the balance will be spent should be specifically tied to the science that needs to be completed. Simply saying the funds will be used to complete the science in a no‐cost extension typically results in additional questions from the IC and delays in award. Recipients not authorized to carryover unobligated balances automatically must submit a prior approval request to the awarding IC.
  2. **PROGRAM INCOME Is program income anticipated during the next budget period? If yes, provide the amount and source(s).** Program Income is defined as gross income earned by the grantee organization, a consortium participant, or a contractor under the grant that is directly generated by the grant‐supported project or activity or earned as a result of the award. This topic is discussed in further detail in Section 8.3.2 of the ***NIH Grants Policy Statement*** and in sections for specialized awards…e.g., Institutional Research Training Grants.

### F&A COSTS [applicable to SNAP awards only] Is there a change in performance sites that will affect F&A costs? If yes, provide an explanation.

In addition to Sections A though G, non‐SNAP awards also must complete **Section H. Budget.** To complete **Section H.1 Budget Form** select the SF424 Research and Related Budget from the drop down menu and follow the instructions for completing the form in the SF424 Application Guide for NIH [(http://grants.nih.gov/gra](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms.htm))n[ts/forms.htm).](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms.htm)) For awards with subaward/consortium budgets, select the SF424 Research and Related Budget Subaward Budget and follow the instructions for Preparing Applications with a Subaward/Consortium in the SF424 Application Guide for NIH [(http://grants.nih.gov/gra](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms.htm))n[ts/forms.htm)](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/forms.htm))

The RPPR is now prepared. Viewing the RPPR prior to submission is strongly encouraged. Using the **View** button from the RPPR Menu screen PIs, PI delegates and reviewers can view a PDF version of an RPPR in a *Work in Progress* status. This PDF version is the way the document will look to NIH. This review is an excellent way to ensure that the correct information and attachments are included.

Then before routing, one last validation check should be performed. Remember that the system prevents submission of an RPPR with errors; however, the system will not prevent submission of an RPPR with warnings. While anyone with access to the RPPR can perform an error check, only the PI can route the RPPR for review: a PI delegate cannot route an RPPR to the next reviewer. The next reviewer and required routing information will be dictated by your institution’s processes. Once routed, the person who routed the RPPR can no longer edit the report: the RPPR status is updated to *Reviewer Work in Progress*. RPPRs that have been routed to a reviewer can be recalled and/or returned if needed.

Completed and validated RPPRs can be submitted for acceptance by the Signing Official (SO) when the SO is the current reviewer. For SNAP awards, PIs may also submit the report only if they have been delegated submit authority. RPPRs for fellowships or non‐SNAP awards must be submitted by the SO. When the RPPR is successfully submitted the RPPR status changes to *Submitted to the Agency.* Throughout the process, the routing of the RPPR is captured and PIs, PI delegates and reviewers can view the routing history at any time using the **View Routing History** button from the RPPR Menu screen. Once the RPPR has been *Submitted to the Agency,* the final RPPR in PDF format, is accessible in the eRA Commons.

After submission, the PI and institution must be prepared to respond for requests for information. If the document has been carefully prepared and checked, follow‐up requests will nonexistant or at worst, minimal. Two eRA system features, the Public Access Progress Report Additional Materials (Public Access PRAM) and the Progress Report Additional Materials (PRAM), provides a means for the grantee to enter, review, route and submit information in response to the automatic notification for a noncompliant publication (Public Access PRAM) or a specific system request by the Grants Management Specialist at the IC (PRAM). Notifications are sent to the PI and SO, so departmental administrator will want to ask proactive questions to know how they might be notified/involved in PRAM requests. (Detailed explanation of the PRAM is provided in the ***RPPR Instructional Guide***.) Of course, Program Officers and Grants Management Specialists may contact the PI or institution directly by email for missing information. It is important to remember that all responses are to be provided or authorized by the SO.

# Concluding Thoughts

This training was intended to be a guide for successfully submitting an annual Research Performance Progress Report, building the basis for many NIH RPPR submissions in the future. You now know how to prepare for submitting an RPPR and how to respond to the various sections of the RPPR. Experience breeds mastery and you will likely learn something new with almost every RPPR submission. Over time you can build on this course with the excellent resources provided by the NIH.

Still on information overload? Here are our top 10 takeaways from this module:

1. From the start of the award (or whenever you pick it up), using your Summary Sheet tool, be sure you capture critical requirements from the Notice of Award, the Funding Opportunity Announcement, the application, actions taken during the budget period, and previously submitted RPPRs.
2. Employ the five elements of effective grant project management—know the grant, read the Notice of Award, establish a timeline, engage in proactive budgeting, and routinely check in with the PI. Keep on top of NIH policies and procedures.
3. With your PI, determine a clear division of labor for the RPPR. Who is taking primary responsibility for what aspects of the document? Nothing is more stressful at the 11th hour of an RPPR submission than discovering a misunderstanding as to who was requesting needed information from subaward/consortium sites. In particular, the research administrator may likely be involved with personnel effort, other support, subaward/consortium materials, the unobligated balance, and the budget (if required). Agree early on tentative deadlines for completion of the various aspects of the RPPR so that any institutional review can occur in a timely fashion.
4. If the grant involves performance site subawards consortia, request or confirm that you have the necessary documentation both for the actual RPPR (in particular for Sections D.2 and G.10) and to meet any additional requirements by your organization.
5. Does the project include human subjects or vertebrate animals? Check that relevant IRB and IACUC approvals are current.
6. Early in the preparation process confirm with the PI that applicable required submissions are current, including publication submissions to Pub Med, human subject data in the Human Subjects System, and data to ClinicalTrials.gov.
7. As early as possible determine the estimated unobligated balance for the award. Early preparation allows for adequate time to prepare an appropriate justification if there is large balance and to react to unexpected account errors if uncovered. Early preparation of the justification of a large unobligated balance will also have a positive influence on the preparation of scientific portion in Sections B and F of the RPPR. If the grant is a non‐SNAP award, meet with the PI to draw up the prospective budget.
8. Take care in preparing items under Section D.2 Personnel Updates. NIH frequently has questions regarding incomplete or incorrectly submitted information for Personnel Effort and Other Support.
9. Along with your PI perform frequent validation checks. View the final document before submitting it for review.
10. During the entire budget period always keep eyes and ears open for any changes related to the grant. Some grant changes, including change of scope or addition of a foreign component, require prior approval. If a change requiring prior approval has occurred without the actual NIH approval, immediate action will be needed, and you should reach out to your grants office for guidance on how best to proceed.

Create a maximum heads‐up culture. Frequently the Research Administrator must juggle RPPR submissions with grant application preparation. You should be able to readily map the due dates of all grant progress reports in your portfolio for six months to a year…not just NIH. Check in with your PIs about potential application submissions. Advance planning will allow you to better serve your researchers within the context of “typical” submission chaos. Sometimes, people understandably get caught up in the trappings of the original application and grant award, but the actual management and progress of an award itself is even more critical than that original application. Your management of a grant throughout the year and the support of a researcher’s timely, complete and accurate RPPR submission ensures the continuity of funding and the continued progress and success of the research.

NIH Guide Notices:

*Reminders of NIH Policies on Other Support and on Policies Related to Financial Conflicts of Interest and Foreign Components:* <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice‐files/NOT‐OD‐19‐114.html>

RPPR Index: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/rppr/index.htm>

R01‐Like RPPR Screen Shots: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/rppr/rppr_screen_shots.pdf>

Rigor and Reproducibility in Grant Applications: <https://grants.nih.gov/policy/reproducibility/guidance.htm>

NIH Sharing Policies and Related Guidance on NIH‐Funded Research Resources see [http://grants.nih.gov/grants/sharing.htm.](http://grants.nih.gov/grants/sharing.htm)

Subscribe to NIH Guide to Grants and Contracts: <https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/listserv_dev.htm>

NIH Stem Cell Registry (<http://grants.nih.gov/stem_cells/registry/current.htm?sort=rnd)>