

# Grant Application Process (New for 2024)

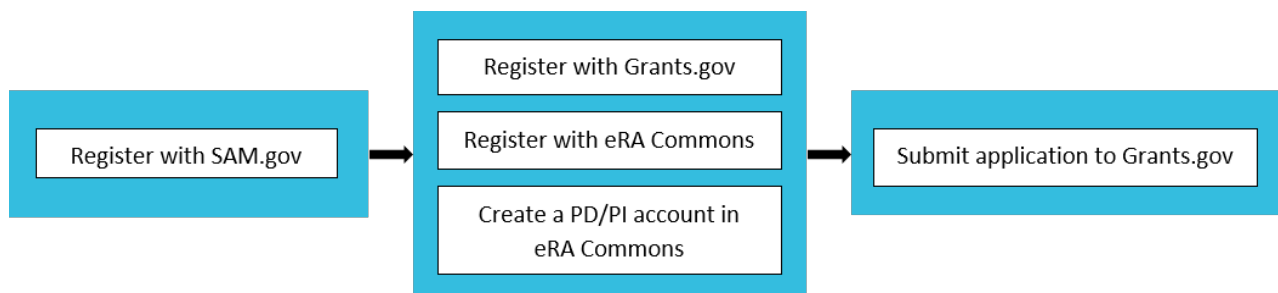
## Introduction

The Department of Commerce has transitioned their grants management system from Grants Online to eRA Commons, changing the NOAA Ocean Exploration grant application process. After **January 1, 2024**, an applicant organization (organization) that applies to a NOAA Ocean Exploration notice of funding opportunity in Grants.gov, competitive or noncompetitive, must adhere to the requirements of the new process as described herein.

## System Registrations

For an organization to be eligible to apply for and receive an award from NOAA Ocean Exploration, they must complete and maintain registrations with three systems: [SAM.gov](https://sam.gov), [Grants.gov](https://grants.gov), and [eRA Commons](https://eracommons.gov).

An organization must complete all three registrations before they can submit a grant application (see **Figure 1**). If they are not already registered with these systems, they should begin the process as soon as possible, as registration for all three systems **can take four-six weeks**. Registration is free for all three systems.



**Figure 1.** Applicants for NOAA Ocean Exploration grants must follow the new Department of Commerce process of system registrations.

If lack of internet access or other technical issues prevent online registration, an organization can contact the Agency Contacts in the notice of funding opportunity for help.

If your organization is already registered with these systems, skip to the section on Application Submission Checks.

## SAM.gov

First, an organization must get a unique entity identifier (UEI) by registering with SAM.gov. Registration can take two weeks or more and requires renewal annually. The username and password for SAM.gov are managed by Login.gov, a secure sign in service for the public to sign in to participating government agencies.

[SAM.gov Registration Guidance](#)

## Grants.gov

After receiving a UEI from SAM.gov, an organization can register with Grants.gov. They can do this before or after registering in eRA Commons. Registration can take two-four weeks.

[Grants.gov Registration Guidance](#)

## eRA Commons

An organization can begin registration for eRA Commons while awaiting their UEI from SAM.gov. However, they will not be able to submit a grant application in Grants.gov until they receive their UEI.

An organization's signing official (SO) is responsible for registering their organization in eRA Commons, creating an "institutional account." The SO is someone in the organization with signatory authority such as the president, executive director, owner, etc. (to legally bind the organization in grants administration matters). The SO will receive emails throughout the registration process. Registration can take up to four weeks.

Once the institutional account is created, the SO can create user accounts for affiliated administrative and scientific staff. Each user must have their own account; accounts should not be shared. To submit a grant application to NOAA, an organization must have a project director/principal investigator (PD/PI) eRA Commons account that is associated with the application's PD/PI. A valid PD/PI eRA Commons ID must be included on an Application for Federal Assistance (SF-424).

[eRA Commons Registration Guidance](#) | [eRA Commons Registration Webinar Recording](#) | [eRA Commons Registration presentation](#)

## Application Submission Checks

After an organization submits a grant application to Grants.gov, the application will undergo two layers of checks. This is a **new** process with the transition to eRA Commons.

## First Check: Grants.gov

Grants.gov checks to see if 1) the application was received on time and 2) all the required forms were uploaded. If the application is accepted by Grants.gov, the organization will receive a Grants.gov tracking number.

**A Grants.gov tracking number alone does not mean an application was sent to NOAA.**

## Second Check: eRA Commons

eRA Commons checks for errors and warnings. If there are errors or warnings associated with an application, eRA will send the organization an email like the one in **Appendix A**. Errors are problems with an application that need to be resolved (e.g., file formatting or role information) for an application to be sent to NOAA.

**An organization must resolve any errors noted and resubmit the application to Grants.gov before the application deadline for it to be sent to NOAA for processing.**

An organization should not assume an application has been received by NOAA until they receive an email from eRA like the one in Appendix B.

More information on application submission and tracking in eRA Commons:

- [Application Submission & Tracking presentation](#)
- [Application Submission and Tracking — Business Process Guide](#)

NOAA does not accept the use of the ASSIST function, which is mentioned in some eRA guidance documents.

## Common eRA Commons Errors

This section describes some common application errors. While Grants.gov may accept an application with these errors, eRA Commons will not. An application that is not accepted by eRA Commons will not be sent to NOAA.

### A PD/PI eRA Commons ID Is Not on the SF-424

A PD/PI on an application must have an eRA Commons account affiliated with their organization. A valid, affiliated eRA Commons ID must be included on the SF-424 in Box 4. Applicant Identifier (see **Figure 2**).

Application for Federal Assistance SF-424		
* 1. Type of Submission: <input type="checkbox"/> Preapplication <input type="checkbox"/> Application <input type="checkbox"/> Changed/Corrected Application	* 2. Type of Application: <input type="checkbox"/> New <input type="checkbox"/> Continuation <input type="checkbox"/> Revision	* If Revision, select appropriate letter(s): <input type="text"/> * Other (Specify): <input type="text"/>
* 3. Date Received: <input type="text"/> Completed by Grants.gov upon submission.	4. Applicant Identifier: <input type="text"/>	

**Figure 2.** A valid PD/PI eRA Commons ID must be included on an SF-424 in Box 4. Applicant Identifier.

Failure to provide a PD/PI’s valid and exact eRA Commons ID on the SF-424 in Box 4 will result in an error, and the application will not be sent to NOAA. While eRA may send a warning that recommends that other personnel on the SF-424 also have a valid eRA Commons ID, their IDs do not need to be included on the form, and an organization can submit an application without them.

eRA Commons requires separate accounts for administrative — signing official (SO), administrative official (AO), account administrator (AA) — and programmatic (scientific) roles — project director/principal investigator (PD/PI). If a single individual is to serve both roles, that individual will need two accounts. Distinct, descriptive usernames and unique passwords are strongly recommended. The contact information (email address, etc.) can be the same for both accounts.

For example: Chris Smith is the president of a small technology company. Chris will be serving as the SO on the account and the PI on an application. Chris needs two accounts and sets them up as follows:

**SO Administrative Account**

- Username: CHRIS SMITH\_ADMIN
- Password: dog house apple

**PD/PI Programmatic Account**

- Username: CHRIS SMITH\_PI
- Password: moon laptop latte

Anyone in an administrative role (i.e., SO, AO, AA) can create a PD/PI account. For instructions on how to create a PD/PI account, see the [Account Management — Information Sheet](#) (starting on page 10) and/or the [Account Management presentation](#).

Once the PD/PI account is created, eRA will generate an eRA Commons ID for the PD/PI, and the PD/PI will then receive email notifications from eRA Commons for application tracking.

## The Unique Entity Identifier Is Not Entered Correctly

An approved unique entity identifier (UEI) provided by SAM.gov must be entered correctly on the SF-424 in Box 8c. UEI (see **Figure 3**). This should be consistent across all platforms: SAM.gov, eRA Commons, and Grants.gov.

8. APPLICANT INFORMATION:	
* a. Legal Name:	<input type="text"/>
* b. Employer/Taxpayer Identification Number (EIN/TIN):	<input type="text"/>
* c. UEI:	<input type="text"/>

**Figure 3.** The primary UEI assigned to the organization must be included on the SF-424 in Box 8c. UEI.

## The Congressional District Is Not Entered in the Correct Format

An organization's congressional district must be entered on the SF-424 in a very specific format. It must be the two-letter abbreviation, a hyphen, and the three-digit district number. For example: Rhode Island's second congressional district would be "RI-002." If any other format is used (e.g., RI002 or RI-02), eRA will generate an error and reject the application. To learn more, see [How to Find Your Congressional District for the SF-424 Form](#).

## PDFs Are Not Flattened

Any PDF uploaded into eRA Commons must be "flattened," meaning the document can no longer be edited. This is especially important for the standard forms (e.g., SF-424, SF-424-A, CD-511).

To flatten a PDF, after filling out the form and saving it:

- **Windows:** Go to File > Print, select Adobe PDF in the Printer dropdown menu, click print.
- **Mac:** Open the PDF in Preview, go to File > Export as PDF.
- Specify a location to save the flattened version.
- Open the saved file to verify that it retained all saved information and is no longer editable.
- Upload the flattened file to Grants.gov.

## There Are Formatting Issues

eRA has strict formatting requirements. While Grants.gov may accept an application with formatting errors, eRA Commons will not. The most common eRA Commons formatting errors are:

- Files are too large (over 100 MB).
- Pages are larger than standard letter paper size (8 ½" x 11").

- File names are too long (greater than 50 characters including spaces).
- Invalid characters are in the file name.

[Full list of eRA formatting requirements](#)

## eRA Commons Checklist

Below is a checklist of things to do to meet eRA requirements when applying for a NOAA Ocean Exploration grant in Grants.gov. This does not include everything needed for a successful application, but does summarize the items discussed in this document. All items below should be checked off before submitting an application in Grants.gov.

- SAM.gov registration and approved UEI.
- eRA Commons registration.
- Grants.gov registration.
- PD/PI account created.
- PD/PI Commons ID entered in Box 4 of the SF-424 exactly the way it is in eRA Commons.
- UEI entered correctly on Box 8c of the SF-424.
- Congressional district formatted correctly (e.g., RI-002).
- All PDFs flattened.
- File sizes less than 100 MB.
- File page sizes no larger than 8 ½ x 11.
- File names shorter than 50 characters (including spaces).
- File names without invalid characters (e.g., &, diacritical marks).

## Helpful Links

- [SAM.gov](#)
- [Grants.gov](#)
- [eRA Commons](#)
  - [eRA Commons Login](#)
  - [eRA Commons Applicant and Grantee Training](#) (Department of Commerce)

Still have questions? Contact the eRA Service Desk at (866) 504-9552 or (301) 402-7469 or visit the [eRA Service Desk website](#) to submit a web ticket. The Service Desk is available Monday-Friday, 7 a.m. to 8 p.m. ET (except federal holidays). The Agency Contacts in the notice of funding opportunity can also be contacted with questions.

# Appendix A: Email Example: Errors and Warnings

**From:** era-notify@mail.nih.gov <era-notify@mail.nih.gov>

**Sent:** Thursday, February 1, 2024 12:00 PM

**To:** First Name Last Name <applicant email>

**Subject:** [External] GRANT123456/ NOAA-OAR-OER-2024-12345 / Notice of Funding Opportunity Name ACTION REQUIRED TO COMPLETE SUBMISSION - Application Errors and Warnings

## ACTION REQUIRED TO COMPLETE SUBMISSION OF GRANT APPLICATION:

NOAA has received the electronic grant application GRANT123456 / Notice of Funding Opportunity Name. Our systems have identified errors and warnings associated with your application. Your application will not move forward for further processing and funding consideration unless you address all identified errors and the authorized organization representative submits your changed/corrected application to Grants.gov before the submission deadline.

Your application ERROR(s) are listed below:

Form Name	Severity	Rule Number	Message Text
SF-424	E	025.6.2	The Commons Username provided in the Applicant Identifier field is not a recognized Commons account.
Projectinfo	E	000.35	The Proposal – Project Narrative.pdf attachment contained formatting or features not currently supported: File Name size greater than 50.

Your application WARNING(s) are listed below:

Form Name	Severity	Rule Number	Message Text
Key Person	W	005.21.7	One of the Accounts included has an “SO” role. This will not prohibit your submission, but may cause some functions to not work properly.

All listed errors must be corrected by the application deadline.

Warnings will not prevent your application from completing the electronic submission process, but serve as reminder to verify that your application complies with specific requirements in the funding opportunity announcement.

Applicant Organizations should refer to the opportunity announcements for guidance on correcting application content.

Any submission to change or correct the grant application must be received by the application deadline or it will not be considered for review.

If you have any questions about this email, please contact the eRA Service Desk via the web at <http://grants.nih.gov/support/> or by phone at 1-866-504-9552.



## Appendix B: Email Example: Application Received by NOAA

**From:** era-notify@mail.nih.gov era-notify@mail.nih.gov

**Sent:** Thursday, February 1, 2024 12:00 PM

**To:** First Name Last Name <applicant email>

**Subject:** [External] GRANT123456/ NOAA-OAR-OER-2024-12345 / Notice of Funding Opportunity Name Application Received

NOAA has received the electronic grant application with the Grants.gov Tracking #GRANT123456 / Notice of Funding Opportunity Name. Our systems have identified no warnings or errors associated with your application. As your application moves forward in the electronic submission process, you will be assigned an application number.

If it passes screening, it will be assigned to an Initial Review Group (IRG) for scientific/technical merit evaluation to the appropriate Program Office in NOAA for funding consideration. You will be notified of the outcome as soon as the information is available.

Thank you for your interest in NOAA's program.

If you have any questions about this email, please contact the eRA Service Desk via the web at <http://grants.nih.gov/support/> or by phone at 1-866-504-9552.