Guidance: Progress Reports

Responsible Office: Sponsored Programs Administration

Responsible Officer (title only): Assistant Vice President for Research and Sponsored Programs

Contact Person: Sarah Senechalle, SPA Assistant Director

Date: August 1, 2021

# Purpose

To help Principal Investigators (PIs) submit timely and accurate progress reports.

# Reason for this Guidance

This guidance will help ensure timely submission of progress reports.

In most cases, funding agencies will not release incremental funding for non-competing renewals or continuations without timely submission of a progress report. Late or missing progress reports can lead to delayed funding. In some cases, agencies will withhold funding to the institution altogether if reports are late.

Diligence is required to ensure appropriate submission of progress reports.

These reports are often required on an annual basis and document accomplishments and compliance with the terms of the award. The reports also describe scientific progress and identify significant changes and plans for the next budget period. Most sponsors allow the PI to submit their progress reports directly, often through agency electronic systems.

Some sponsors require that the Authorized Organizational Representative (AOR) sign the report confirming the information provided follows award terms and conditions. The AOR may be referred to as the Signing Official. When AOR signature is required, SPA will need to be involved with review or submission of the report. This may include signing a report document (e.g., in a Word or pdf form) or electronically approving a report in an agency electronic research administration (eRA) system (e.g., NIH eRA Commons).

# Guidance

The PI is responsible for knowing their award and sponsor’s terms and conditions to determine the frequency and content of their reports.

Progress reports are becoming increasingly complex, both in the information sponsors are requesting and systems used to submit the reports. PIs are strongly encouraged to begin preparing reports as early as possible. With sufficient lead time, SPA will work with the PI or their department to answer questions to help ensure timely submission.

To submit a question, PIs should send an email to [awards@niu.edu](mailto:awards@niu.edu) with the heading “Progress Report Assistance” and provide the grant (44) or InfoEd number (##-###) and report due date. The PI will be connected to their Award Coordinator or another SPA staff within twenty-four (24) business hours.

PIs are encouraged to contact SPA as early as possible with reporting questions.

# Reporting Scenarios

**The sponsor system requires submission of the report by the AOR (i.e. SPA):**

The PI completes the report.

SPA submits the report.

At least **ten (10) business days before the deadline,** the PI gives SPA access to the completed report in the sponsor system.

Notification processes vary between sponsor systems and can be unpredictable. SPA requests PIs send an email to [awards@niu.edu](mailto:awards@niu.edu) with the Subject Line: “SPA submission required for progress report” and the following information:

* SPA grant or InfoEd number
* Report due date
* Sponsor eRA system in which the report must be submitted
* Contact person if the PI will be unavailable for questions. If possible, the person should be able to answer budget and programmatic questions.

If ten (10) business days is not practicable, the PI must at least notify SPA of their intent to submit a report. SPA cannot guarantee accurate or timely submission for reports received less than five (5) business days before the deadline.

The PI can submit directly, but the sponsor requires AOR signature on a report form or cover page.

After obtaining the AOR signature, the PI submits the report.

To obtain the AOR signature, **at least ten (10) business days before the deadline**, the PI emails the completed report (generally a Word or pdf file) to [awards@niu.edu](mailto:awards@niu.edu) with the Subject Line: “SPA signature needed for progress report.” The email should include the following information:

* SPA grant or InfoEd number
* Report due date
  + Contact person if the PI will be unavailable for questions. If possible, the person should be able to answer budget and programmatic questions.

If ten (10) business days is not practicable, the PI should at least notify SPA of their need to obtain AOR signature for their report. SPA cannot guarantee timely signature for reports received less than (5) business days before the deadline.

The PI can submit directly, and the sponsor does not require AOR signature.

The PI completes and submits the report.

The PI is responsible for retaining a copy of the report within their departmental files.

SPA may request a copy of the report or confirmation that it was submitted for audit or other purposes.

In both cases when AOR signature is required:

The SPA Award Acceptance Team is responsible for reviewing these reports and signing as the AOR. SPA’s review is to ensure the report meets agency administrative requirements.

Each progress report will be assigned to a SPA Award Coordinator (a member of the Award Acceptance Team) who will work directly with the PI to obtain the AOR signature or submit the report.

The AOR/Signing Official for progress reports is current SPA Assistant Director, Sarah Senechalle. The Award Coordinator will strive to review and return the report to the PI within five (5) business days of receipt when the full deadline is met. This goal of this timeline is to provide the PI and SPA time to work through any reporting questions or system issues that may arise.

If the report requires budget information, the PI is encouraged to confirm this information with their SPA Grants and Contracts Associate (GCA) before submitting the report for AOR signature. This will help expedite the process as budget questions will have been addressed between the PI and GCA before AOR review begins. Inaccurate budget information may delay signature and submission of the report.

**Research Performance Progress Reports (RPPR)**

Most federal research agencies require the PI to submit Annual, Interim and Final [RPPRs](https://www.nsf.gov/bfa/dias/policy/rppr/)for grants. Some awards allow the PI to submit their RPPR directly, while others require the PI to initiate their RPPR and route it to the AOR/Signing Official.

NSF awards do not require AOR signature or submission, PIs can submit these reports directly to the agency. NIH requires AOR submission through NIH eRA Commons. See separate [SPA Guidance for NIH RPPRs.](https://www.niu.edu/divresearch/funding/resources/index.shtml) (The Guidance is found under the Guidelines tab on the SPA Forms and Policies page.)

**Information typically reported in an RPPR:**

* Basic institutional and project identifying data
  + Signing Official (SO) field: Should list the current SPA Assistant Director, Sarah Senechalle
* Accomplishments from past activity period and goals for upcoming activity period
* Outcomes or “products” from the activity such as technologies and publications
* Effort of all personnel, including all collaborators
* Impact of the project and major contributions
  + For example: to the discipline, human resources (teaching, training), public knowledge, social conditions
* Changes to the project: such as a delay in plans, changes in approach, compliance (animal use, human subject involvement, biohazards), other support, etc.
  + See separate [SPA Guidance for Research Disclosures and Other Support](https://www.niu.edu/divresearch/funding/resources/index.shtml)
* Budget information (may be required)
* If applicable: the protocol for Animal Subjects or Human Subjects Enrollment data

PIs are strongly encouraged to check their draft RPPR for errors when using a sponsor’s eRA system, if available, and correct errors before submitting for AOR signature. This will avoid delays caused by system glitches or incomplete information.