Reminder: NIH Policy on Use of Hypertext in NIH Grant Applications

Sep 20, 2020

NOT-OD-20-174 reminds the NIH applicants about the guidance that restricts the use of hypertext (e.g. hyperlinks and URLs) in NIH grant applications.

Use of unallowable hyperlinks and URLs raise the following concerns:

- Reviewer Confidentiality: Sophisticated web-based tracking systems may allow identification of reviewers who attempt to access the link
- Overstuffing: All materials required for review must be contained within the page limits of the application. Linking out to additional information may exceed the content limitations of the application
- Review Consistency: some reviewers may consider hyperlinked materials while others may not, which may create inconsistency among reviewers
- Malware: The possibility exists for malware or other breaches to occur on the reviewer’s computer and/or system

Applicants are reminded of the guidance in the SF424 (R&R) Application Guide:

- Hyperlinks and URLs are only allowed if specified in the funding opportunity announcement (FOA) and form field instructions where it is typically limited to citing relevant publications in biosketches and publication lists
- It is highly unlikely for a FOA to allow links in Specific Aims, Research Strategy, and other page-limited attachments
- Hyperlinks and URLs may not be used to provide information necessary to application review
- Reviewers are instructed against viewing linked sites and are cautioned that they should not directly access a website unless the link was specifically requested in the application instructions
- When allowed, the actual URL text should appear on the page rather than being hidden behind a word or phrase
- Applications that do not follow this guidance may be withdrawn from review and funding consideration

Direct inquiries to GrantsPolicy@od.nih.gov.