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# GRANTS & FUNDING

NIH Central Resource for Grants and Funding Information

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## ABOUT GRANTS

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## Format Attachments

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You will find several kinds of fields in your application forms - check boxes, dates, data entry fields and attachments. This page provides guidance on attachments. Attachments are documents that are prepared outside the application using whatever editing software you desire (e.g., Microsoft Word), converted to PDF format and then added or uploaded to your application. We require PDF format to preserve document formatting and a consistent reading experience for reviewers and staff.

We have very specific attachment formatting requirements. Failure to follow these requirements may lead to application errors upon submission or withdrawal of your application from our review process.

## Citations

- Use whatever format for citations that you want.
  - We do not require a specific citation format.
  - The use of "et al." in place of listing all authors of a publication is acceptable practice.
  - Most style guides include format guidance for citations and all formats are acceptable.
  - SciENcv , a tool to prepare biosketches for NIH and other agencies, uses a standard format used by the National Library of Medicine (see

Citing Medicine [↗](#)). If your organization does not already have a standard, you may want to consider this one.

- Remember to comply with our [public access policy](#) [↗](#) by including [↗](#) the PMC reference number (PMCID) when citing applicable papers [↗](#) that you author or that arise from your NIH-funded research.

## Combining Information into a Single Attachment

- Ensure all information is directly visible in your PDF.
  - If you need to combine information from different sources into a single document prior to uploading, do not use “bundling” or “portfolio” features which combine multiple documents into a single file by providing links to the individual files.

## Electronic Signatures

- Electronic signatures on PDF attachments within your application are not allowed.
- To adhere to policies requiring electronic signatures on PDF attachments (e.g., electronically-signed other support format pages), you can electronically sign the document and then “flatten” the PDF.
- Documents with signatures (e.g., letters of support) can be printed, signed, scanned and attached in PDF format.

## Filenames

- Save all document attachments with descriptive filenames of 50 characters or less (including spaces).
- Use unique filenames for all attachments in an application (or within a component of a multi-project application).
- Use any of the following characters: A-Z, a-z, 0-9, underscore, hyphen, space, period, parenthesis, curly braces, square brackets, tilde, exclamation point, comma, semi colon, apostrophe, at sign, number sign, dollar sign, percent sign, plus sign, and equal sign.
- Use one space (not two or more) between words or characters and do not

begin the filename with a space or include a space immediately before the .pdf extension.

- Avoid the use of ampersand (&) since it requires special formatting (i.e., &amp;).


## File Size

- Ensure file size is greater than 0 bytes - we cannot accept a 0 byte attachment.
- Keep attachment file size to 100 MB or less per Grants.gov recommendation.

## Flattened PDFs

A PDF that has fillable fields, electronic signatures, text boxes or images inserted, becomes layered with each of these elements representing a layer. The existence of these layers interferes with the handling of the documents in eRA systems. Consequently, PDF documents included in applications, progress reports, and other information collected in eRA Commons must be flattened. A flattened PDF is simply one in which all the layers are merged together into a single flat layer.

Many simple PDFs are already flattened - all the information is contained in a single layer. Uploading a PDF that isn't flattened may result in an eRA Commons error message. You will need to replace your PDF with a flattened version to complete the submission process.

There are a number of methods to flatten a PDF, the easiest of which is to print it as a PDF. For Adobe Acrobat, follow these [illustrated instructions](#) . For other software, check your program's documentation.

## Font (size, color, type density) and Line Spacing

Adherence to font size, type density, line spacing and text color requirements is necessary to ensure readability and fairness. Although font requirements apply to all attachments, they are most important and most heavily scrutinized in attachments with page limits.

Text in your attachments must follow these minimum requirements:

- **Font size:** Must be 11 points or larger. Smaller text in figures, graphs, diagrams and charts is acceptable, as long as it is legible when the page is viewed at 100%.
  - Some PDF conversion software reduces font size. It is important to confirm that the final PDF document complies with the font requirements.
- **Type density:** Must be no more than 15 characters per linear inch (including characters and spaces).
- **Line spacing:** Must be no more than six lines per vertical inch.
- **Text color:** No restriction. Though not required, black or other high-contrast text colors are recommended since they print well and are legible to the largest audience.

We recommended the following fonts, although other fonts (both serif and non-serif) are acceptable if they meet the above requirements.

- Arial
- Georgia
- Helvetica
- Palatino Linotype

Legibility is of paramount importance. Applications that include PDF attachments that do not conform to the minimum requirements listed above may be withdrawn from consideration.

## Format Pages

- Watch for form field instructions that refer you to specific **format pages** (e.g., biosketch, training data tables).

## Headers and Footers

- Do not include headers or footers in your attachments. We will add headers, footers, page numbers, bookmarks and a table of contents when we assemble your grant application upon submission.

- Headings (e.g., Significance, Innovation) within the text of your attachments improve readability and are highly encouraged.
  - Some funding opportunity announcement and form instructions provide guidance on organizing the content of attachments including specific headings that must be present.

## Hyperlinks and URLs

- Hyperlinks and URLs are only allowed when specifically noted in funding opportunity announcement (FOA) and form field instructions. The use of hyperlinks is typically limited to citing relevant publications in biosketches and publication lists. It is highly unusual 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 not obligated to view linked sites and are cautioned that they should not directly access a website (unless the link to the site was specifically requested in application instructions) as it could compromise their anonymity.
- When allowed, you must hyperlink the actual URL text so it appears on the page rather than hiding the URL behind a specific word or phrase.

Examples:

- NIH (<http://www.nih.gov/>)
- <http://www.nih.gov/>

## Images

- Digital images of material such as electron micrographs or gels must only be included within the page limits of the Research Strategy. The maximum size of images to be included should be approximately 1200 x 1500 pixels using 256 colors. Figures must be readable as printed on an 8.5" x 11" page at normal (100%) scale.
- Investigators must use image compression such as JPEG or PNG.

## Language & Style

- Use English. (See 45 CFR § 75.111 - English language)
- Avoid jargon.
- Spell out acronyms the first time they are used in each application section/attachment and note the appropriate abbreviation in parentheses. The abbreviation may be used in the section/attachment thereafter.

## Marking up Attachments

- Do not mark-up your PDF documents with comments, sticky notes or other features that are added on top of your PDF document content. This information may not be retained in your final application image.

## Orientation

- Both portrait and landscape attachments are accepted. However, keep in mind that landscape can be difficult to read online and may require reviewers and staff to scroll to see all available text.

## Page Limits

- Adhere to the page limits defined in the [Table of Page Limits](#) or within the text of the funding opportunity announcement (FOA) or NIH Guide notice (including Notices of Special Interest).
- Page limits defined in a FOA should be followed when different than those found in the [Table of Page Limits](#). Page limits defined in a related NIH Guide notice should be followed if different than either the [Table of Page Limits](#) or the FOA.
- If no page limit for an attachment is listed in either the [Table of Page Limits](#), Section IV of the FOA under Page Limitations, or in a related NIH Guide notice you can assume the attachment does not have a limit.
- We systematically check many page limit requirements and provide error or warning messages to minimize incomplete or non-compliant applications. These systematic checks may not address all page limit requirements for a specific FOA and do not replace the checks done by staff after submission. You must comply with all documented page limits and should not rely solely on system validations.
- Some page limits apply to multiple attachments that when combined must

stay within a designated limit. You may want to prepare your information in a single document to ensure you are within the page limit and later break-up the information into the various separate attachments. Our systems will accommodate a certain amount of white space resulting from splitting the information into the separate attachments when verifying compliance with a limit.

- When preparing an administrative supplement application, follow the [Table of Page Limits](#) using the activity code of the parent award and any additional limits specified in the FOA or a related notice.
- Do not use the appendix or other sections of your application to circumvent page limits (NOT-OD-11-080).

## Paper Size and Margins

- Use paper size no larger than *standard letter paper size* (8 ½" x 11").
- Provide at least one-half inch margins (½") - top, bottom, left, and right - for all pages. No applicant-supplied information can appear in the margins.

## Scanning

- Avoid scanning text documents to produce the required PDFs. It is best to produce documents using your word-processing software and then convert the documents to PDF. Scanning paper documents may hamper automated processing of your application for agency analysis and reporting.
- We recognize that sometimes scanning is necessary, especially when including letters of support or other signed documents on business letterhead.

## Security Features

- Our systems must be able to open and edit your attached documents in order to generate your assembled application image for agency processing and funding consideration.
- Disable all security features in your PDF documents. Do not encrypt or password protect your documents. Using these features to protect your documents also prevents us from opening and processing them.



## Single vs. Multi-column Page Format

- A single-column page format easily adapts to various screen sizes and is highly encouraged.
- Multi-column formats, especially for information spanning multiple pages, can be problematic for online review.

## Video

- Videos cannot be imbedded in an application, but are accepted under limited circumstances as post-submission material. See NOT-OD-12-141 and NOT-OD-20-061.
- When allowed, the application must be structured at the time of submission to indicate that a video will be submitted post-submission.
  - The cover letter submitted with the application must include information about the intent to submit a video; if this is not done, a video will not be accepted.
  - Key images, “stills” and a brief description of each video must be included within the page limits of the research strategy. Sufficient descriptive information must be provided within the research strategy to understand the information presented in the video, as not all reviewers may be able to access the video, depending on technological constraints.

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