Electronic Signature and Approval Process

Submitting a Proposal Package Electronically
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DOCU SIGN® OVERVIEW

Electronic signing provides a quick, easy, and secure method for signing and submitting internal research forms without the need to appear in person. This guide provides information on how DocuSign® is used to access, complete, sign, and submit a proposal package envelope to Research Administrative Services (RAS).

ACCOUNT SETUP

A DocuSign® account is not required for the submission or signature of a proposal package, but it is useful for tracking and managing submissions. Accounts are created by RAS.

GETTING STARTED

Before beginning this process, there are a few things to keep in mind:

- **Speak to a research administrator.** Consultation with a research administrator is highly recommended prior to any submission. This helps to avoid any errors in the submission.

- **F&A Rate Change.** There has been a change in the F&A rate that will affect any projects starting on or after July 1, 2013. Visit the HU research website for more information. (http://www.howard.edu/research/)

- **RAS reserves the right to withdraw for consideration, any submission that was received by RAS less than five (5) full business days prior to the submission deadline date.** When planning a submission, make sure to give each signer at least 2 business days to review the submission. It is also important to make sure that there is ample time to resolve any possible issues that may arise.

- **RAS will not review or submit incomplete proposal packages.** Be sure that submissions are in FINAL form, as required by the sponsor. Once the submission has been sent to the next person for review, access to that envelope will not be available.

- **RAS reserves the right to withdraw for consideration, any proposal that lacks sponsor solicitation guidelines.** It is important that all sponsor guidelines are clearly followed as defined.

- **There are limitations when using Grants.gov PDFs.** These limitations and their solutions are explained on page 7.
To begin, go to the following page and click on the ‘Click here to submit a proposal to RAS’ link: [http://www.howard.edu/research/ras/esap.html](http://www.howard.edu/research/ras/esap.html)

Navigation to this link may also be possible by following the path below:

HU Website → Research & Innovation → Click on the red “Electronic Signature and Approval Process” link → Click on the “Click here to submit a proposal to RAS” link

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**THE PROPOSAL ROUTING STRUCTURE**

Below is the current proposal routing structure for **Academic Affairs** and **Health Sciences**. This routing structure should be followed to properly route a proposal to RAS.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>ACADEMIC AFFAIRS</th>
<th>HEALTH SCIENCES</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>PI</strong></td>
<td><strong>PI</strong></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Department Chair</td>
<td>Department Chair</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Andre Powell</td>
<td>Jeanette Gibbs-Deshields</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<a href="mailto:andre.powell@howard.edu">andre.powell@howard.edu</a>)</td>
<td>(<a href="mailto:jgibbs-deshields@howard.edu">jgibbs-deshields@howard.edu</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School/College Dean</td>
<td>School/College Dean</td>
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<tr>
<td>Wayne Frederick</td>
<td>Wayne Frederick</td>
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<tr>
<td>(<a href="mailto:wfrederick@howard.edu">wfrederick@howard.edu</a>)</td>
<td>(<a href="mailto:wfrederick@howard.edu">wfrederick@howard.edu</a>)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Research Administrative Services</td>
<td>Research Administrative Services</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>(<a href="mailto:ora@howard.edu">ora@howard.edu</a>)</td>
<td>(<a href="mailto:ora@howard.edu">ora@howard.edu</a>)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

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**POWERFORM SIGNER INFORMATION**

Define who will review and sign the proposal package envelope. Enter the name and Email address of the individuals who fit the listed roles. Keep the following in mind:

- Someone other than the PI may complete the proposal package. Contact RAS for advice and direction.
- Business units with no Chair or Dean may enter the name and email address of the department head and business unit director/manager. These spaces may also be left blank if necessary.
- The research administrator may be added to the CC role.
• The name or email address of an unknown reviewer may be found with the use of the University website, Microsoft Outlook, or other available resources.

• If a reviewer is unavailable, an alternate reviewer may be used. It is the duty of the PI to contact the office of the reviewer and request information regarding the alternate reviewer. This change may also be made later with the assistance of RAS.

When all of the necessary information has been entered, click the **Begin Signing** button. An email, containing an access code, will be sent to the email address used in the PI role.

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**ACCESS CODE AUTHENTICATION**

The requested code is located in an email from “Proposal Needs Your Signature!” The subject line will begin with, “Email Validation.” Each access code is unique to a specific proposal envelope and should be saved for future use.

Copy the code from the email and paste it in the space provided.

Click the **Validate** button.

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**CUSTOMER DISCLOSURE AGREEMENT**

The consumer disclosure covers the terms and conditions of system. It may be read in leisure. It may also be printed by clicking on the small print icon to the top right.

To move forward, select the checkbox to agree to conduct business electronically with Howard University and click the **Review Document** button to continue.

**Important!**
The **Finish Later** and **Decline to Sign** options will be discussed later and should be ignored for now.
THE PROPOSAL PACKAGE ENVELOPE

This 15-page envelope includes a copy of the following common documents:

- Application to Seek Off-Campus Funds
- Conflict of Interest Disclosure form (PI ONLY)
- F&A Waiver/Reduction form
- Cost Sharing Authorization form
- NIH PI Assurance form

ENVELOPE LAYOUT

MAIN MENU

The main menu offers the following services and features:

- Use the triangles to navigate up or down one full page. A page number may also be entered to jump to that page.
- Select or enter a percentage to zoom in or out of the envelope.
- Download a PDF copy of the envelope at any time. When asked, choose to download the combined document. The envelope may be saved to a computer or an eternal hard drive such as a flash/thumb drive.
- Print the envelope. If the envelope does not print correctly, save it then print the saved copy.

Use more options and features such as:

- **View History** of events pertaining to the envelope.
- **View Certificate** that may be used for legal matters.
- **View Consumer Disclosure** for the terms and conditions.
- **Decline to Sign and Markup**: Not applicable for now.
- **Finish Later** saves the progress of the envelope. To return to the envelope, select the **Resume** link in the original Email that included the access code.

The X closes the window.
PAGE ICONS
The icons on the right side of the page represent actual pages in the envelope. Click on a page icon to jump to that page. The scroll bar may be used to navigate through pages and page icons.

**Blue Page Icon**
The currently active page.

**Blank Page Icon**
A read-only page.

**Circled Page Icon**
A page with fillable fields that requires an action. Required actions may include signatures, attachments, or choosing an item from a dropdown.

**Checked Page Icon**
A page that has fillable fields, but no required actions.

**Important!**
All circled page icons must become checked page icons in order to send this envelope to the next person in the routing structure.

ATTACHMENTS AND SIGNATURES

**ATTACHMENTS**

The **Attach** tag is used to upload supporting documents. You may attach one document or many. **DO NOT use the Send by fax option!!!**

Click the **Browse** button and select the document that should be attached. The attach tag will look like change to

Once a document has been attached, the opportunity to attach another will be presented. If no other attachments are necessary, select **No**. If another attachment is needed, select **Yes**. A new Attach tag will appear on the page. Click on that tag and attach a document as before.

To remove an attached document or an Attach tag, click on the tag and select **Remove Attachment**.

There are no space or size limitations to the documents that may be attached. Images or documents created in Word, Excel, Adobe PDF, or similar applications can be attached.
**Important!**
Grants.gov PDF documents are complex and cannot be attached to the proposal envelope. These documents should be emailed to the reviewers separately. It will be best to do so after the proposal package envelope has been submitted for review.

**SIGNATURES AND INITIALS**

This portion of the guide will explain how to sign or initial documents within the envelope. Click on a **Sign Here** or **Initial** tab to begin.

To adopt a signature:
- Verify that your name and initials are correct. Make any necessary changes.
- Select a style of handwriting by clicking on the **Change Style** link and choosing a style from the ones available.
- Finally, click **Adopt and Sign** to save the signature. The adopted signature will be used throughout the document.

Each signature has its own identification code that links the signature to the email address of the signer. Since these are in-house documents and the identification code verifies the identity of the signers, RAS has agreed to accept any of the signatures provided by the system.

Initials are required when a reviewer makes a change to the form.

**COMPLETING THE ENVELOPE**

This section of the guide will give an overview of the various forms found in this envelope. It will also provide information on completing these forms. If further information or assistance is required in regard to completing these forms, please contact RAS.

The first page of the envelope is for information only. It provides a list of items included within the envelope and documents that may need to be attached.

Page 2 is a handy checklist that will aid PIs in making sure that everything that they may need is on hand and ready to be included in the proposal package. This checklist is totally optional.
APPLICATION TO SEEK OFF-CAMPUS FUNDS

This form spans from pages 3-6 and is used by research administrators as an overview of the project. This form is required for filing and record purposes.

Form Requirements
Pages 3-6: Complete the form in its entirety.
Page 6: Attach the proposal, including statement of work, budget, and any other information required by the sponsor and RAS.
Page 6: Sign the form.

CONFLICT OF INTEREST DISCLOSURE STATEMENT FORM

This form spans from pages 7-10 and must be completed using information of the PI. This form is required for audit purposes and will be filed by RAS.

It is required that one of the options from the dropdown box at the top of the page is selected. Based on which option is chosen, further action may be required.

Choose if the PI has a conflict of interest with this project. The PI is required to use the Attach tag provided to attach a document that explains the conflict.

Choose if there are other key personnel listed on the project. These key personnel will have to complete a COI form (found on the research website) and email a signed copy of the form to the PI. The PI can then download and attach the signed form to the envelope using the Attach tag provided.

Choose if the PI is the only key personnel on the project and has no conflict. Even if this option is chosen, the form must be completed.

Form Requirements
Page 7: Select an option from the dropdown box. Attach any additional documents if necessary.
Pages 7-10: Complete the form in its entirety.
Page 10: Sign the form.
F&A WAIVER/REDUCTION FORM

This form is on page 11 and is required if the requested F&A rate is different from the current negotiated rates. The current rates are located on the research website.

It is required that one of the options from the dropdown box at the top of the page is selected. Based on which selection is chosen, further action may be required.

Choose if the requested F&A rate is the same as a current, negotiated rate. No further information is required and this form may be left blank.

Choose if the F&A rate is different from the current, negotiated rates. The form will have to be completed and a justification for the rate difference will need to be attached using the Attach tag. A letter from the sponsor or a copy of the RFP requesting the different rate is sufficient.

Form Requirements
Page 11: Select an option from the dropdown box.
Page 11: If required, complete the form in its entirety, attach a justification, and sign the form.

AUTHORIZATION FOR MATCHING FUNDS/COST SHARING

This form is on page 12 and is necessary if cost sharing is required.

It is required that one of the options from the dropdown box at the top of the page is selected. Based on which selection is chosen, further action may be required.

Choose if cost sharing is not required. No further information is required and this form may be left blank.
Choose if cost sharing is required. Use the Attach tag to attach an explanation for the cost sharing. The form will have to be completed and signed.

Form Requirements
Page 12: Select an option from the dropdown box.  
Page 12: If required, complete the form in its entirety, attach an explanation, and sign the form.

**NIH PI ASSURANCE FORM**

This form is required for any project seeking funding from the NIH. It can be completed within the system if the PI is the only key personnel listed on the project. See below for further instructions in that case.

It is required that one of the options from the dropdown box at the top of the page is selected. Based on which selection is chosen, further action may be required.

Choose if the project is funded by the NIH. The form will have to be completed and signed.

Choose if the project is NOT funded by the NIH. No further information is required and this form may be left blank.

**Important!**
If the project is funded by the NIH and there are other key personnel listed, the correct option in the dropdown should be selected and this form may be left blank. The NIH PI Assurance form found on the research website should be completed by the PI, distributed and signed by all key personnel, then attached to page 6 of the envelope.

Form Requirements
Page 12: Select an option from the dropdown box.
Page 12: If required, complete the form in its entirety and sign the form. If necessary, attach a completed copy of this form to page 6 of the envelope.
COMPLETING THE PROCESS

When all required actions within the envelope have been completed, the Confirm Signing button and a message will be displayed.

Before pressing the button, review the envelope and make any changes to the information as necessary. Click the gold Confirm Signing button when done.

Once the button is pressed, a window will display a confirmation of the completion of the envelope. The first reviewer is immediately sent a link to the completed proposal package envelope.

The option of downloading a PDF copy or printing a copy of the completed envelope is also given at this point.

DocuSign® accounts are created by RAS, so ignore the login request. Close the window by clicking on the X.

TRACKING A SUBMISSION

Reviewers are asked to sign a document within 2 business days of receipt. A submitter has the ability to see where a submission is in the routing structure at any given time. It is also possible to see if a reviewer has even viewed a submission. Below is a brief summary of this feature. For more detailed information, see the Account Management Guide or contact RAS.

Log into DocuSign® and, from the Home tab, click on Out For Signature.

In the Results Pane, select an envelope to track.

Review the information in the Details Pane.

At this point, the reviewer may be contacted if the document has not been signed within the allotted time. It is the duty of the PI to contact the office of the reviewer and request information regarding the alternate reviewers.
**FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS**

**What are the roles of the two new signatories?**

The signature of the Associate Vice President for Academic Finance (*Andre L. Powell*) or Executive Director of Health Sciences (*Jeanette Gibbs-Deshields*) affirms that:

- an analysis has been performed on the total and effective Facilities and Administrative rate; and
- committed efforts of faculty and staff are in accordance with IBS or other equivalent source documents.

The signature of the Provost and Chief Academic Officer (*Wayne Frederick*) affirms that:

- the PI does not commit the University to anything that has not been approved by the proper authorities;
- appropriate letters of commitment from concerned subcontractors and faculty are included in the package;
- the budget and budget justifications are rational and intelligible; and
- the proposal, as drafted, represents the University well.

**Where are the proposal packages stored?**

DocuSign® is operated by a third party outside of the University. All documents are saved to DocuSign® servers and are accessible, even if the HU network is down.

**Are electronic signatures legal?**

In 2000, the U.S. Electronic Signatures in Global and National Commerce (ESIGN) Act established electronic records and signatures as legally binding, having the same legal effects as traditional paper documents and handwritten signatures. But not all eSignature solutions are created equal. Only DocuSign® warrants federal ESIGN Act compliance. Per European Directive 1999/93/EC, DocuSign®’s advanced signature is legally admissible and enforceable in the European Union. In fact, almost every civilized country in the world has adopted an electronic signature law, and the vast majority recognized DocuSign®’s form of electronic signature as meeting the definition of a valid electronic signature.

Since the documents included in the proposal package are primarily in-house documents, Research Administrative Services has agreed to accept documents signed electronically through DocuSign®.

**How do I get a DocuSign® account?**

The RAS staff will create and distribute accounts for PIs and other signers upon request. Once complete, an introductory email will be sent to the user with login credential information, reference material, and a link to the proposal package.
How do I find out who are Alternate Signatories?

Reviewers, especially Department Chairs and Deans, should always inform their staff of when they will be unable to sign documents and who will be their designated signatory. It is up to the PI to contact reviewers and their offices to find out the status of signatory responsibilities.

Can the routing process be more parallel instead of hierarchal?

No. The routing process is a hierarchal in nature and DocuSign® follows the rules of that process.

Does the person I’ve asked to sign a document need an account?

No! Reviewers do not need an account to review or sign envelopes.

Can some members of the routing process be edited or omitted?

It is recommended that all members of the routing process review and sign the proposal as necessary. If there is no other choice, the signature of the budget officer and AVP are the only signatures that are absolutely required in order for RAS to process a proposal.

See the Account Management Guide for information regarding editing signers.

Can I edit signers once the proposal has already begun the routing process?

Yes. As the PI, you have full control of the routing of the document. See the Account Management Guide for more information.

What is an envelope?

An envelope is a collection of documents that are sent to recipients for review and signature.

Do I have to sign all of the documents? If not, which ones require signature, etc.?

No. There are some documents that are required and some that are mandatory based on your research. The Application to Seek off-Campus Funds and Conflict of Interest Disclosure forms are always required. Forms such as the F&A Waiver/Reduction Request, Cost Sharing Authorization are only required if the items are included in the proposal.

How do I go about making a change after I have submitted the proposal to be routed?

Once you have submitted a proposal through the routing process, no changes can be made unless the proposal is marked up by a reviewer within the routing process.
What fields in the document are required?

Each required form must be thoroughly completed before it is submitted. Before you confirm signing a document, make sure that it has been completely filled out and all additional attachments are included.

Can any of the information on the forms be pre-populated?

There are limits to what information can be pre-populated due to the fact that all PIs are using the same template and pre-populated data may not be applicable to some PIs. For example, PIs have different Chairs and Deans depending on the school or college under which they are employed.

Can I print or save the document at any stage?

Yes. The PI or anyone who has reviewed a document may save or print the document at any time. To save the document, use the Finish Later feature under More button. To get back into the document, click on the Resume link in the email containing the access code. Printing can be done by clicking the printer icon.

How can I "mark-up"/edit a document within DocuSign®?

A reviewer may wish to suggest a change to a document by using the mark-up feature. The document will be sent back to the PI with the suggested edits. The PI will have to make the changes and sign off on those changes.

How do I track a proposal?

The PI may edit signers or the order of signing by logging into their DocuSign® account. Reviewers may view the date and time previous signatures were made. See the Account Management Guide for more information.

How do I know who signed?

As the individual requesting that a document be signed, you control who signs by providing the reviewer’s name and email address in the beginning of the process. The document is routed to the reviewer’s email with a request to sign. DocuSign® records the signer’s IP address and a timestamp of the signing activity.

DocuSign® gives you complete visibility and control. You can log into your account and see who’s viewed your proposal, who’s signed it, and who’s on deck to sign next.

Is a DocuSign® Signature a “Digital Signature”?

No. DocuSign® lets you create an electronic signature, which is not exactly a digital signature.
What document types are supported in DocuSign®?

You can use DocuSign® to sign many kinds of documents: .doc, .docx, .pdf, .xls, .xlsx, .txt, among others. Grants.gov PDF documents cannot be attached to DocuSign®. These documents should be emailed to the members of the routing structure separately. It will be best to do so after you have completed your DocuSign® submission.

An electronic signature, as defined by the Federal ESIGN Act, is an “electronic sound, symbol or process, attached to or logically associated with a contract or other record and executed or adopted by a person with the intent to sign the record” (ESIGN). All 50 states have laws that define electronic signatures in substantially the same way.

Whereas, a digital signature or digital signature scheme is a mathematical scheme for determining the source of a digital message or document. A digital signature by definition is a technology, a method of authenticating. It does not by itself meet the standards of what constitutes a valid electronic signature, nor does it mean that the signer’s identity has been verified. Digital signatures are most often used to apply a digital “seal” to an electronic document in order to make it tamper-evident. In fact, DocuSign® uses digital signatures in this way; DocuSign® customers and signers have the option to apply a digital signature to a DocuSign®ed document when the transaction is complete.

So when you need to get a legally-binding signature, make sure you’re using a complete electronic signature solution.

How does my signature get in there?

The first time you sign a document, you’ll be asked to adopt a signature. You can type in your name and select a signature style, create one with your mouse, or use a stylus on a tablet PC. This signature will be associated with a unique identifier so that every document you sign will be recorded as signed by you and you alone. The process of uploading a scanned image of your pen-and-paper signature is currently being researched.

Can I be notified each time a document is signed?

Yes, but we have elected not to activate this feature. Instead, you will receive an email notification when the document has completed the process.

What do I do if the process is held up by RAS?

RAS staff has been trained to respond to DocuSign® submissions in a timely manner. If there has been no movement within RAS, it is suggested that you contact the research administrator.
what do I do if the process is held up by another reviewer?

we ask that all reviewers respond to DocuSign® submissions within 2 business days. we ask that PIs contact reviewers who take longer to respond.

Can reminders be sent to reviewers?

Email reminders are sent to reviewers once a day. The PI may call, email, or visit a signer if necessary.

what internet browsers support DocuSign®?

DocuSign® has been tested on and works fine with the latest versions of Internet Explorer, Mozilla Firefox, Google Chrome, and Apple Safari. It is also compatible with most mobile-based browsers.

Does DocuSign® support SMS messaging?

DocuSign® does not support SMS messaging, but you can get email reminders on a mobile device if you sync your HU email to your mobile device.

What if I am a PI and the Chair or Dean?

Enter your name and email address in each applicable area of the routing process. You will be required to sign as the PI and as the Chair or Dean.

Does this process affect the deadline to submit a proposal to RAS?

No. When submitting a proposal for routing, PIs should keep in mind that proposals should be received by RAS at least 5 business days prior to the proposal deadline date given by the sponsor. We ask all reviewers to sign DocuSign® submissions within 2 business days.

Can the routing process be auto-populated?

Yes. Unfortunately, all PIs are using the same template. The idea of creating a different template for every PI is not efficient.
VERSION NOTES

Version 3 – updated 5/31/2013
Images were updated to reflect the icons and images currently used in the system.
Some grammar issues were fixed.
Information on tracking a proposal package was added.
Some text was updated based on FAQs and system update.

Version 2
More detailed instructions were added.
FAQs were added.
Images were updated to reflect the icons and images currently used in the system.
A table of Contents was added.
SUPPORT

Any questions or comments regarding DocuSign® should be forwarded to the individuals or offices below:

Office of Grants Management
huogm@howard.edu

LeeRoy Smith
Research Administrative Services
leesmith@howard.edu
(202) 806-4759