

OFFICE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY

OVERVIEW

THE OFFICE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (OIT) is responsible for information technology applications, operations, policy, and training. Our mission is to provide cost-effective and quality business, mission, and customer-centric information management services. OIT's three divisions (Applications Division; Information Policy, Planning, and Training Division; and Operations Division) strive to enable collaboration among the NIFA community by providing balanced innovation, manageability, and use of information resources across the agency.

6,465 Number of applications accepted

146 Number of review panels held

2,604 Number of awards made

DIVISIONS

APPLICATIONS DIVISION

This division is responsible for system and software development and maintenance for all NIFA applications. Applications personnel support the following key systems and business areas: Leadership Management Dashboard; peer review system; document management; Research, Education, and Economics Information System (REEIS); Current Research Information System (CRIS); Plan of Work; and the eGrants suite of applications. Management of the CRIS database is critical to NIFA's ability to keep the public apprised of how research tax dollars are spent—CRIS provides documentation and reporting for ongoing agricultural, food science, human nutrition, and forestry research, education and Extension activities. Agency staff depend heavily on the grants suite of applications to receive, review, and award grants. Division team members provide comprehensive software life-cycle support, including project management, software engineering, architectural and design services, application testing, technical documentation development, and database management.

OPERATIONS AND ADMINISTRATIVE SYSTEMS DIVISION

This division is responsible for the operation and maintenance of all NIFA information technology resources, 24 hours a day, 7 days a week. The IT service desk support staff, an integral part of this unit, is the front line for information technology problem resolution. Managing the VPN telework system and resolving eAuthentication issues are key elements of the IT service desk portfolio. The core services provided by this unit include email management, BlackBerry support, customer support, security, system administration, desktop management, hardware support, technology consulting and planning, and conference room and panel support.

INFORMATION POLICY, PLANNING, AND TRAINING DIVISION

This division is responsible for leadership and coordination on information and information technology policy issues, training, the proposal services unit, enterprise architecture, records management, and e-government program leadership, including business transformation. The division is NIFA's home for AgLearn, USDA's official learning management system of record for all employee learning activities. AgLearn's training portfolio includes a variety of online courseware, such as Skillsoft, Books24x7, and Ninth House. Specific responsibilities include information technology strategic and operational planning, capital planning and investment control, paperwork reduction, and reporting with USDA's Office of the Chief Information Officer and other federal agencies. Visit www.nifa.usda.gov/about/offices/istm_policy.html for more information.

OFFICE OF INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (CONT'D)

KEY CHALLENGES FACING OIT

FUNDING

NIFA has a significant IT software development backlog, in particular in the grants area. NIFA, in 2012, requested \$3 million for additional funding to support the information technology modernization of its grant applications systems and processes. This is the third year this request will be part of the White House budget; the requests were not funded in the previous 2 years. The additional monies are required to support the development of systems that support the entire business lifecycle required to award competitive and formula grants. The increase will address requirements such as the creation of an electronic jacket for grant processing, participation in the Grants Management Line of Business, improvements to the peer review IT application, design of an automated award amendment process, electronic post-award management, and business intelligence.

DATA CENTER CONSOLIDATION

USDA has set very aggressive goals for the consolidation of data centers. NIFA has two data centers, both of which must be closed in fiscal year 2012. This is an unfunded requirement that will significantly impact OIT resources and schedules for the year. NIFA has 120 servers that must be moved.

MAJOR INITIATIVES

eGRANTS

Award amendments and Peer Review System are both areas of eGrants that have long-standing need for analysis, design, and development where significant effort will be directed. A pilot for award amendment processing is planned for the second quarter of 2012. The implementation of the Financial Management Modernization Initiative (a USDA accounting system) and the Automated Standard Application for Payments (the Treasury Payment system NIFA uses) will continue to necessitate further process and software development activities. These actions are likely to extend well into 2012 as these new processes evolve and become integrated in the grant-making business of NIFA.

DATA CENTER CONSOLIDATION

The administration has launched the Federal Data Center Consolidation Initiative and has issued guidance for federal agencies. The guidance called for agencies to migrate existing server assets to the "cloud." USDA has begun work on this effort and NIFA has been directed to migrate all 120 of its servers to a USDA data center in 2012.

REReport

It is anticipated that significant resources will be invested in 2012 to continue development of REReport. REReport is NIFA's grant and formula project reporting system, building on and replacing the existing CRIS web forms system. It will implement the Research Performance Progress Report (RPPR), a standard progress report format that all federal research agencies will be required to use for research grant reporting. While schedules have not been finalized for 2012, it is expected that some components of REReport will be implemented during the year.

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