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FDP's *EXPANDED CLEARINGHOUSE* PILOT SHOWCASES SIGNIFICANT REDUCTION IN RESEARCH ADMINISTRATION BURDEN

Federal Demonstration Partnership (FDP) member institutions recently demonstrated that use of an online repository of institutional data could significantly reduce the administrative burden involved in initiating and overseeing multi-institution research projects. **FDP members saved more than 17,500 staff hours during a one-year pilot** by using the online data repository, named the *Expanded Clearinghouse*, as an alternative to transaction-by-transaction exchange of similar institutional data.

Lynette Arias, one of the pilot's co-chairs, explained: "*Data in the Clearinghouse are used to satisfy federal requirements for verifying the financial and compliance adequacy of a research partner institution prior to and during the conduct of multi-institution research projects. The repository includes entity information such as* **Single Audit results, facilities and administration (indirect cost) rates, fringe benefit rates, key institutional contact information, and key compliance certifications**.*"* Analyzing these data to assess financial or compliance risk is expected prior to one institution issuing another a collaborative research transaction called a "subaward".   These transactions allow an institution receiving a grant or contract to more fully address a research question by partnering with one or more other organizations who bring their own complementary yet unique, specialized expertise to the research project. Pamela Webb, the other co-chair of the pilot, said "*Efficiency and timeliness matter; the scientific value of these partnerships can be negatively impacted when research cannot be started due to administrative delays. However, the federal government imposes significant regulatory and compliance obligations on the institution issuing the subaward to make sure that funds are only deployed to compliant partners ("subrecipients") and that the issuing institution actively monitor technical and financial progress.*" Federal limitations in reimbursement of subaward issuance and monitoring costs further underscores the need for an efficient process. **This area is thus seen as an important target for both regulatory reform and administrative process improvements**.

During the period July 1, 2016 – June 30, 2017, **127 campuses of 111 FDP member higher education institutions** exchanged more than **10,800 transactions** related to joint research projects. Access to a shared, online repository of core institutional and audit information **saved more than 17,500 staff hours during a one-year period**. Both *Clearinghouse* members (and other organizations) can easily access, search, and print the publicly available institutional profiles at fdpclearinghouse.org. The ability to add an institutional profile is limited, however, to FDP member institutions at this time. Arias, who sits on FDP's governing body, also shared: "The F*DP intends to discuss the possibility of allowing non-FDP members to join the Expanded Clearinghouse, and information on that will be made available once a decision has been made.*"

An ancillary benefit of the *Expanded Clearinghouse* pilot was improved national understanding about the types of subaward transactions exchanged by research institutions. During the final year of the pilot:

- **34%** of transactions were **new subawards**, and **51%** were **modifications** (such as additional funding for a project over time). The remaining percentage represents missing data.
- **62%** of the transactions were for **Department of Health and Human Services sponsors (primarily the National Institutes of Health**), with another 12% for private sponsors. The remaining percentage represents a variety of other federal, for-profit, and non-profit sponsors.
- **81% were subawards on grants,** 11% for cooperative agreements, and 6% for contracts.
- **91% were cost-reimbursement subawards**, and 4% were fixed price.

Expanded Clearinghouse data are kept up-to-date via business agreements with each member institution, assisted by use of automatic email notifications when key compliance dates are expiring. Data are certified accurate by an authorized institutional official before publishing, and certain key data are also administratively reviewed for accuracy by FDP volunteer reviewers. Additional enhancements to the *Clearinghouse* now being programmed include an Application Programming Interface (API) to allow batch downloading of profile data into institutional systems (anticipated delivery in Spring 2018). Further burden-reducing enhancements include allowing batch uploading of data from other federal database systems, such as the Federal Audit Clearinghouse (FAC) and the System for Award Management (SAM).

The success of the pilot project (**a 98.6% user satisfaction rating, plus an estimated average time savings of more than 1.6 hours/transaction**) resulted in the FDP's decision in December 2017 to expand implementation of the *Expanded Clearinghouse* on an ongoing basis for all of its 155 members (an estimated total of 200 campus profiles).

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