

Program Assistance Letter

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DOCUMENT TITLE: Implementation
of Enhancements to Current Electronic
Information Systems

TO: Health Center Program Grantees
Primary Care Associations
National Cooperative Agreements

I. Background

In order to better support the work of health centers in managing their Health Center Program grants, the Health Resources and Services Administration (HRSA) is streamlining and simplifying many of its grants and data reporting processes through enhancements to its current electronic systems. These enhancements will produce numerous benefits for grantees including improved processes for applying for grants, facilitating submissions for requesting changes in scope of project, and more efficient performance reporting. For HRSA, these enhancements will bring together into one centralized system, data and information used to monitor grants, record program changes, and track program performance. This system will assist and simplify communication between grantees, project officers, and the HRSA Office of Grants Management. In addition, grants application processes that are currently based on uploading hard copy paper documents will be replaced with more efficient electronic submission through the HRSA Electronic Handbook (EHB) portal. With the enhanced EHB, grantees and HRSA staff will have more ready access to reliable information needed for effective decision-making and program implementation. The transition to a single information management system through the HRSA EHB is currently being phased in and targeted to be fully operational for Health Center Program grantees by the end of calendar year 2008.

II. HRSA's Communication Strategy, Training & Technical Assistance Resources

HRSA is aware that anticipated changes to its EHB system will require changes in the way that Health Center Program grantees collect and report data. Therefore, in advance of implementing each major step requiring active grantee involvement (highlighted in Section III below), HRSA is committed to:

- detailed communication notifying grantees of the scheduled changes to the electronic system;
- in-depth testing of each change to the system involving both grantees and HRSA project officers;
- providing technical assistance at each stage including:

- conducting demonstrations at grantee meetings throughout the year (e.g., BPHC All Grantee Meeting, NACHC, State and Regional PCA meetings);
- holding a grantee conference call or web cast to describe changed processes;
- establishing an “acclimation” website to assist in familiarizing grantees with EHB data and information submission requirements;
- providing a help desk (toll free telephone number), email box, and online access to frequently asked questions (at hrsa.answers.gov) to respond to grantee questions; and
- enabling Project Officers to assist grantees with the changes.

The intent of HRSA’s communication strategy is to assure that Health Center Program grantees are notified in advance of any change and to provide direction in accessing training and technical assistance resources designed to assist grantees in the transition to the current EHB processes.

III. Implementation of Enhancement Activities

The items that follow below are the major activities to be undertaken in the implementation of enhancements to HRSA’s EHB by the end of 2008. As stated previously, HRSA is committed to providing Health Center Program grantees with detailed information for each activity prior to and during implementation.

1. Change in Scope (CIS)

In August 2007, Health Center Program grantees were instructed to submit requests for prior approval of changes in scope (CIS) of project through a new electronic process using HRSA’s EHB wherein grantees upload required application forms for review and approval. This new electronic process replaces the former one of sending CIS applications to bphscope@hrsa.gov. The process and technical assistance are described in PIN 2002-07 which is available at <http://bphc.hrsa.gov/systemhelp/>. It is anticipated that a more robust CIS (Phase 2) submission and approval process will be forthcoming in April of 2008 with full electronic submission.

2. Baseline Scope Verification (BSV)

Accurate, reliable and timely information on each Health Center Program grantee’s scope of project will help HRSA staff provide better customer service to grantees, facilitate more timely decision-making on grantee submissions such as CIS, and assure that accurate information is readily available. All grantees will be required to participate in a scope verification process during the first quarter of 2008. The purpose of the process is to transfer data on the most recently approved scope of project from a “paper” application to the EHB. Each Health Center Program grantee will be required to enter the EHB system and verify data on scope of project, specifically information on approved services, sites and other activities/locations. Grantees will be given the opportunity to review and verify site data pre-populated from HRSA’s current databases and will be required to enter data on services and other activities that are part of the current approved scope of project. These data will establish an electronic baseline of scope of project for each Health Center Program grantee which will be available for all future grant activities and actions.

3. Grant Applications

Commencing in February 2008 with the fiscal year (FY) 2009 Service Area Competition and Budget Period Renewal applications, applicants for FY 2009 funding opportunities will go through the two-step process of:

- initiating and submitting the initial grant application in Grants.gov and
- finalizing and completing additional information required through the EHB including any HRSA program specific forms, such as forms 5-Part A, 5 Part-B and 5 Part-C, electronically.

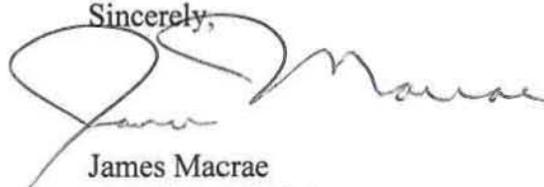
Health Center Program grantees will submit requested application data using both structured forms that will be completed electronically and unstructured forms that will be uploaded. The data collected in the scope verification process will pre-populate forms for future grant submissions, thereby saving health centers' time and effort in preparing grant applications. Unstructured data will be attached electronically to provide the remaining required information for each grant application. Ultimately, grantees will not only save time and effort in the preparation and submission of grant applications, but they will also be able to track the status of their grant applications.

4. Uniform Data System (UDS)

UDS reporting will be conducted through the EHB commencing in February 2009 with the submission of calendar year (CY) 2008 data (i.e., CY 2008 data will be submitted via the EHB rather than by computerized disk). Comprehensive technical assistance regarding data collection and reporting will be made available to grantees during 2008. Access to these resources can also be arranged by contacting your Primary Care Association.

HRSA is committed to assuring a smooth and successful transition to the current electronic processes in the EHB system. To this end, we are preparing numerous technical assistance resources to assist grantees. We are confident that these processes will streamline, simplify, and reduce grantee burden. We look forward to working with you on this transition. If you have any questions, please contact the BPHC's CIS and BSV Help Line at 301-443-7356.

Sincerely,



James Macrae
Associate Administrator