

Making Hawkeyes Happy

How the University of Iowa eliminated complex, time-consuming, error-prone, and non-duplicable processes with InfoReady...

An InfoReady Case Study



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An early adopter of InfoReady in many of their science and health units, the University of Iowa (UI) has around 50-70+ competitions active at any given time. The UI has become a pioneer in bringing InfoReady to their limited submission process and to their internal funding programs, including their prestigious Arts and Humanities Initiative (AHI) program.

Cheryl Ridgeway, Research Support Coordinator, in the Office of the Vice President for Research (OVPR) and Jose Jimenez, Director, Research Information Systems, Information Technology Services, are the staff members who led the transition from manual processes to InfoReady's automated system for research competitions.

Cheryl and Britt Ryan, Research Development Coordinator in the OVPR, co-led a recent webinar with a focus on using InfoReady for a long-standing internal funding program within the central research office. They informed us that "the AHI program supports humanities scholarship and work in the creative, visual and performing arts. Three grant mechanisms are offered with support available up to \$30,000."

"According to our office archives, the AHI program was first run in the mid-90s. At that time, there was no electronic application system, and everything was done by email, campus mail, and hand delivery. Each application was assigned to three reviewers, which likely meant copying applications in triplicate and campus mailing to the reviewers. It was hardly an ideal system – one much prone to errors, non-responses, missed communications, and missed deadlines. This was a very staff and time intensive process."

A homegrown electronic system was developed around 2003 to facilitate the process. "While this was a good system, it was limited: certain materials were not accepted through this site, and while reviewers could access the application, there was no dedicated section for comments and scores. Those had to be entered into a form provided separately by the administrator to the reviewer and returned to the administrator again by email or campus mail. Eventually, the electronic system became technically unsustainable."

"Having pieces of the process in multiple places allowed more room for error. Often comments and scores were handwritten instead of typed and could be difficult to decipher. The whole process was time-consuming and environmentally harsh with way too much paper exchanging hands."

That was then. This is now.

Today, Iowa's AHI competitions are generally representative of award competition processes in other programs and institutions:

- There are two application cycles per year, one in the spring and one in the fall. One submission per applicant and one resubmission per project is allowed.
- AHI receives 15 - 25 applications per cycle and funds between 25-30%.
- Application requirements include a narrative of no more than five pages addressing specific criteria plus a budget (template provided).
- A CV of up to four pages is also required, listing previous AHI awards held within the past three years as well as brief outcomes. An optional supplemental materials upload is available in the form of audio-visual or digital files.
- The spring competition is announced in early January through use of a mass email to faculty and staff in the arts and humanities disciplines. In addition to posting to their listserv for deans', directors, and departmental executive officers, the program is also posted on the OVPR website and in their newsletter. The program is advertised in the Division of Sponsored Program's Grant Bulletin, which is available to all faculty and staff.

Cheryl then detailed the next stage of the spring process, which has been simplified thanks to InfoReady's automated platform:

"In January and into February we schedule the review meeting, finalize the reviewers' site in InfoReady, and send a reminder announcement to faculty and staff. It's quite helpful that the reviewer section within InfoReady can be edited and updated even after the competition is live and accepting applications.

The submission deadline is in early March. We use InfoReady to review the applications, confirm applicant and project eligibility, and do a quick check of the uploaded documents for compliance. We have a two-step review process and shortly after the deadline, a request for endorsement of the projects are sent to the applicants' collegiate department heads. The second step is a committee review and before assigning reviewers to applicants and opening this step, we perform a conflict of interest check. This is done by way of an email to our reviewers. The email lists the applicant names and project titles for reviewers to scan and to let us know if a conflict exists before applications are assigned. This saves significant time.

In April or early May we hold the review meeting with all the reviewers present. Scores and comments are due in InfoReady 48 hours in advance of the meeting, which allows the administrator time to enter scores in a spreadsheet and compute averages.

After the review meeting, recommendations are sent to the Vice President for Research for award approval, and notifications and comments are sent to all applicants.”

What’s next for Iowa’s InfoReady use? Enhancing the impact.

Britt explained that “our use of InfoReady is a work in progress. We’re exploring the option of automated progress reports, which is accessed through each application, in order to make all materials (application, reviewer scores and comments and the final report) accessible in one convenient place. We are also continuing to reach out to other departments, schools and colleges within the University of Iowa to educate them about InfoReady and see if this platform would work for their purposes.”

“The bottom line is that InfoReady Review positively impacts everybody. For staff, the application materials are in one location and easily downloaded. We can view draft applications and activity. The reviewer comments and scores are all in one place for us to view. We have the ability to copy previous competitions for new cycles, so we don’t have to create new competitions from scratch. We can just copy them over and reuse some of that information.”

“We also have a note functionality within individual applications so that we can take notes regarding each application and go back and review them.

The application form is brief and simple to use and uploading documentation is easy with a variety of formats allowed. For the reviewer, application materials, guidelines, reviewer information and the score and comments section are in one place.”

Britt concluded with “As you can see, the common theme here is that materials and most processes are centrally located, which facilitates the entire process. InfoReady makes our work lives just a little bit easier.”

To learn more, schedule a demo, or get in touch with current InfoReady users, please visit www.inforeadycorp.com.

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