

Section 3505(a)(2) of the PRA of 1995 provides the OMB Director authority to approve the streamlined clearance process proposed in this information collection plan. This information collection plan was originally approved by OMB in January of 1997. It streamlines the clearance process for all discretionary grant information collections which do not fit the generic application process.. The streamlined clearance process continues to reduce the clearance time for the U.S. Department of Education's (ED's) discretionary grant information collections (that fit the 1890-0001 process) by two months or 60days. This is desirable for two major reasons: it would allow ED to provide better customer service to grant applicants and help meet ED's goal for timely awards of discretionary grants.

Improved Customer Service

The time saved by a streamlined clearance process means an earlier approval of ED's discretionary grant application packages and "on the street" to the waiting public much sooner than through the current process. This translated into better customer service to our applicants because of the increased time to complete applications, which ranked high on their list of priorities. In addition, the streamlined clearance process continues to allow ED program staff to devote more time to the actual administration of grants, instead of having to wait for the completion of the lengthier clearance process.

Supporting ED's Goal

Time saved in this component assists ED in meeting its goal of awarding all discretionary grants on a timely basis. To meet this goal for each fiscal year, ED will award most of its new grants by May.

Therefore, we propose that the clearance process for discretionary grant information collections continues to be streamlined in the following manner: the clearance process begins when ED submits the collection to OMB and, simultaneously, publishes a 30-day public comment period notice in the Federal Register. OMB would still have 60 days, following the beginning of the public comment period, to reach a decision on the collection.

Under this streamlined clearance process, OMB has 60 days to review each collection and the public would still have an opportunity to comment on each collection once instead of twice. As we have learned, one public comment period is sufficient; especially, when it means saving 60 days per clearance. This continues to help ED provide better customer service to grant applicants and award all discretionary grants on a timely basis.