

Current Research Funding Information System (CRFIS): Linking Information Systems to Improve Scientific Knowledge Production

Andreas Esch (esch@elfi.info)

ELFI - Servicepoint for ELectronic Funding Information, Germany

History

In 1996 a group of German research consultants declared their need to develop a common research funding information system. With the help of DFN e.V. and the German Ministry for research a software development was initiated. Two years later GMD and Ruhr University Bochum published the first version of an Electronic Research Funding Information System (ELFI), a very modern java-based internet-program. After two phases of evaluation, the research funding consultants tested the software and defined further criteria leading step by step to an amelioration.

The main problem in this period was financing the work of ELFI. From the beginning on the ELFI-Team was located at Ruhr University Bochum. During this time the ELFI team had to cope with a turnover of staff and high fluctuation. In 2002 the team established a payment structure with an institution-related licence-model. Before final realization the fee structure had to be revised twice. Since 2006 a new funded company, the ELFI Forschungsdienstleistungen GmbH came to life and took the responsibility for operational business and development.

Nowadays ELFI provides information for more than 120 customer institutions throughout Germany, Austria and Switzerland with more than 12.000 individual user accounts.

To respond to the users needs constantly, ELFI was modernized several times during the last decade. Thus main achievements in transmission speed and functional capability could be realized. The last step of modernization in 2011 led to a servlet-server tool based on Apache Tomcat with ICEfaces, a project from Finland with very useful and user-friendly features.

Managing research funding information

ELFI collects information about research funding from the World Wide Web with the help of software-robots. Relevant web sites are observed regularly for news and changes among research funding programs and their calls. As a result these changes can be discovered easily and communicated to the ELFI user subsequently.

Dissemination of research information

The concept of ELFI is highly user-orientated. Each user defines a set of individual profiles describing the selection criteria for interests in funding programmes. ELFI supports a targeted search by combining filters from different dimensions. With the help of a special tool box each user is assisted in filtering research funding information that fits best to his interests. An additional instrument helps collecting and forwarding information items within one institution. Consequently ELFI enables the user to hint at news among a special research field or to suggest a special program.

Each funding information item within ELFI consists of a short abstract and the important key data. This indexing procedure contributes to define programs and their content for prospective

users. One great advantage of the ELFI database is an indexing structure that allows the approach of relevant funding information from different sites. Many programs within ELFI address more than just one research field. Often collaboration between researchers from different subjects is intended to support knowledge sharing. Therefore interdisciplinary programs can be discovered from a different start point of search.

Experiences with Platforms/Portals

The ELFI-Team has several experiences in proliferating own data to other platforms. For example, we developed a Web-Service for the KISSWIN platform. For a period of three years programs especially for young scientists could be found there.

The ELFI data model corresponds to some parts of the CERIF data model. We want to show how we connect to some entities and attributes of CERIF, so ELFI funding information could be used with any CRIS.