



H E L P D O C U M E N T A T I O N

FastLane Help System

Technical FAQs

Table Of Contents

Technical FAQs	1
Technical FAQs Introduction	1
Technical FAQs – General.....	2
Technical FAQs – Printing	4
Technical FAQs – Proposal Preparation	7
Index	9

Technical FAQs

Technical FAQs Introduction

Technical FAQs are organized into four groups:

- [□□□General](#)
- [□□□Printing](#)
- [□□□Proposal Preparation](#)

All Technical FAQs are listed below.

General

1. What software do I need to use the FastLane Proposal Preparation application?
2. Which file formats, besides PDF, are now supported by FastLane?
3. How do I exit the FastLane Proposal Preparation application?
4. I get a security library error message. What should I do?
5. What security is provided with FastLane?
6. I cannot enter data in a FastLane field. It stops me from entering the last character. What should I do?
7. Should I keep on hitting a button if I do not get a quick response?

Printing

1. When trying to print a FastLane form (i.e., pull up a form in Adobe Reader) I get "An Error Occurred While Trying to Use This Document" error message or a blank page and a "Document Done" message. What is wrong?
2. When NSF prints the proposals, do they print the proposal in color?
3. My document had 1" margins and I have a printout to prove it. My program officer says my proposal is non-compliant because NSF prints it out with 0.85" margins. Why did FastLane change my document?
4. My project description was 15 pages in my word processor but when I pull it up in FastLane it is 16 pages. What is happening?
5. My PDF files look fine when I view/print them one at a time. But when I print the entire proposal (or when I send the proposal to my Sponsor Project Office or equivalent) characters are missing and equations corrupted. What is happening?
6. Can you print out the PI/Co-PI Information Form?
7. How do I print a copy of my completed report?

Proposal Preparation

1. After the proposal was submitted, I go into the Proposal Status Inquiry/FastLane organizational Reports application and get a message that the Proposal does not exist. What's happening?
2. Why is the Information Form not accepting my answers for the gender, ethnicity, and disability questions?

Technical FAQs – General

1. What software do I need to use the FastLane Proposal Preparation application?
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4. I get a security library error message. What should I do?
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7. Should I keep on hitting a button if I do not get a quick response?

1. What software do I need to use the FastLane Proposal Preparation application?

FastLane is a Web-based application. You need:

- A Web browser to access and work in FastLane (see Web Browser Compatibility)
- A Portable Document Format (PDF) file reader, generally Adobe Reader 5.0 or higher, for viewing and printing PDF files
- A word processor

See [Software Requirements for FastLane](#).

FastLane no longer requires that you create your own PDF files. You can upload any document into FastLane that is in a format listed in Acceptable Formats for FastLane.

Only if you want to create your own PDF files to upload into FastLane, you also need: Adobe Acrobat Distiller or another application that creates PDF files.

2. Which file formats, besides PDF, are now supported by FastLane?

See [Acceptable Formats for FastLane](#) for a full rundown of the many formats FastLane now accepts.

When you upload your file, FastLane will convert it to a PDF file. You can then proofread the PDF file, accept it, and save it in FastLane. See [Upload a File](#).

For problem-free uploading, continue to use standard fonts. This will avoid the need for font substitution.

Create PostScript files with dvips 5.66a, which comes with the MikTeX package. Files created with dvipsk 5.58f, dvips(k) 5.86, groff, or troff may cause problems when the files are concatenated.

You can still upload PDF files. FastLane will accept them, if you do the following:

- Do not use PDFWriter to create the file.
- Embed and subset all fonts in the file.
- Put the files in Acrobat 3, 4, or 5 format.

3. How do I exit the FastLane Proposal Preparation application?

FastLane does not require a logout. When you are finished with your work in *any* FastLane application, just close your browser before leaving your computer.

4. I get a security library error message. What should I do?

You are receiving an error message because your computer has cached an old security certificate. To fix this, clear out your cache in your browser. Contact your organization's technical support personnel or FastLane User Support for instructions on how to clear the cache.

5. What security is provided with FastLane?

FastLane uses a Secure Server (https). All of your transactions with FastLane are encrypted.

6. I cannot enter data in a FastLane field. It stops me from entering the last character. What should I do?

The glitch is an embedded space in the field. You need to delete the space as follows:

1. Put your cursor in the field.
2. Space all the way to the right.
3. Back space all the way to the left, deleting all the characters.

You will now be able to enter all the information including the last character.

Note: If a field does not show up at all, it probably means that you are using a Windows 3.1 version of a browser on Windows 95, 98, or NX. Download and install the latest version of the browser to fix this problem. See [Web Browser Compatibility](#).

7. Should I keep on hitting a button if I do not get a quick response?

No. Hitting the button repeatedly will not speed things up.

Technical FAQs – Printing

1. When trying to print a FastLane form (i.e., pull up a form in Adobe Reader) I get "An Error Occurred While Trying to Use This Document" error message or a blank page and a "Document Done" message. What is wrong?
2. When NSF prints the proposals, do they print the proposal in color?
3. My document had 1-inch margins and I have a printout to prove it. My Program Officer says my proposal is non-compliant, because NSF prints it out with 0.85" margins. Why did FastLane change my document?
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6. Can you print out the PI/Co-PI Information Form?
7. How do I print a copy of my completed report?

1. When trying to print a FastLane form (i.e., pull up a form in Adobe Reader) I get "An Error Occurred While Trying to Use This Document" error message or a blank page and a "Document Done" message. What is wrong?

Most likely, you are receiving these messages because your Adobe Reader has been configured as a plug-in. This prevents your browser from working on a secure Web site such as FastLane.

To fix the problem, delete the plug-in and configure your browser to use Adobe Reader as a helper. See [Configure Adobe Reader for FastLane](#).

2. When NSF prints the proposals, do they print the proposal in color?

For cost and technical reasons, NSF cannot, at this time, reproduce proposals containing color. Therefore, it is better not to rely on colorized objects to make your arguments. PIs that include high-resolution graphics or other graphics where exact color representations are required for proper review, must submit paper copies of the proposal to NSF, in addition to submitting the proposal through FastLane.

Here is how to submit the paper copy:

In the **Other Information** section on the **Remainder of the Cover Sheet** screen, click the check mark box for High Resolution Graphics/Other Graphics Where Exact Color Representation Is Required For Proper Interpretation (GPG Chapter I.G.1). FastLane displays the number of paper copies of the entire proposal you must submit to NSF.

The paper copies must be postmarked, or have legible proof of mailing date assigned by the carrier, within 5 working days of the electronic submission.

See [What Is the Cover Sheet](#) for instructions on accessing the **Remainder of the Cover Sheet** screen.

3. My document had 1-inch margins and I have a printout to prove it. My Program Officer says my proposal is non-compliant, because NSF prints it out with 0.85" margins. Why did FastLane change my document?

FastLane did not change the document. You may have used the **Fit to Page** option to print your proposal on your own printer. NSF's Proposal Processing Unit does not use that option. Please turn off the **Fit to Page** option and then view/print your proposal.

4. My project description was 15 pages in my word processor, but when I pull it up in FastLane it is 16 pages. What is happening?

If you are uploading a non-PDF file, be sure to check the number of pages and margin sizes.

If you are uploading a PDF file, adjustments may be necessary, because MSWord and similar word-processing packages determine page breaks by the settings and capabilities of the output device. That's why you may get different page breaks when you print to the PDF file rather than to your printer.

To solve this problem, follow these steps:

1. Set the default page size in the **Job Options** section of Adobe Distiller.
2. Correct the default page size.
3. Convert the file to PDF.

5. My PDF files look fine when I view/print them one at a time. But when I print the entire proposal (or when I send the proposal to my Sponsor Project Office or equivalent), characters are missing and equations corrupted. What is happening?

The fonts were not embedded in the files that you uploaded. If you are a TeX/LaTeX user, you did not have fonts embedded and subsetted.

6. Can you print out the PI/Co-PI Information Form?

Yes. Do the following:

1. Access the **Form** Preparation screen (see [Prepare a Proposal](#) or [Edit a Proposal](#)). On the **Form Preparation** screen, click **Print** in the right navigation bar. The **Print Menu** screen displays.
2. Click the **GO** button for **PI Co-PI Info** button. The **PI/Co-PI Information Form** displays in PDF format. (If you need Adobe Reader, see [Adobe Reader for FastLane](#).)
3. Click the **Print** icon in the upper-left of the screen. The PI/Co-PI Information Form prints.

7. How do I print a copy of my completed report?

To print your report, do the following:

1. Access the Project System Control screen (see [Access the Project Reports System](#)).
2. Click **Review and/or Submit**. Your project report displays.
3. Click the **Print** icon on your Web browser to print the screen.

Technical FAQs – Proposal Preparation

1. After the proposal was submitted, I go into the Proposal Status Inquiry/FastLane Organizational Reports application and get a message that the proposal does not exist. What's happening?
2. Why is the Information Form not accepting my answers for the gender, ethnicity, and disability questions?

1. After the proposal was submitted, I go into the Proposal Status Inquiry/FastLane Organizational Reports application and get a message that the proposal does not exist. What's happening?

There is a lag between the time the proposal is submitted via FastLane and the time it shows up in the FastLane Proposal Status applications. Here is the NSF process at the point of your proposal's submission in FastLane:

- You submit the proposal.
- FastLane generates an e-mail notifying NSF's Proposal Processing Unit that a proposal has been submitted in the system.
- The Proposal Processing Unit logs in the proposal, prints and copies the proposal, and sends it to the relevant NSF program.
- The data is uploaded to the NSF Proposal and Review System (PARS).
- NSF staff accepts the data on the PARS.
- NSF staff downloads the Proposal Status information to the FastLane database that night for access by the PI and SPO.

2. Why is the Information Form not accepting my answers for the gender, ethnicity, and disability questions?

If you select "I choose not to reply to this question" for the gender, ethnicity, and disability questions, FastLane will not print a response on the form.

Index

- 1**
- 1-inch 4
- A**
- Accept 1, 2, 7
- Accepted 1, 2, 7
- Access 2, 4, 7
- Acrobat 1, 2
- Acrobat Reader 2
- Addition 4
- Adobe 1, 2, 4
- Adobe Acrobat 2
- Adobe Acrobat Distiller 2
- Adobe Distiller 4
- Adobe Reader 1, 2, 4
- Adobe Reader 5.0 2
- After 1, 7
- All 1, 2
- All Technical FAQs 1
- An Error Occurred While Trying 1, 4
 - Use This Document 1, 4
- Answer 1, 7
- application 1, 2, 7
- Assign 4
- B**
- Back 2
- be 2, 4
- Browser 2, 4
- C**
- Changes 1, 4
- Chapter I.G.1 4
- Characters 1, 2, 4
- Check 4
- Check marks 4
- Choose 7
- Click 4
- Color 1, 4
- colorized 4
- colorized objects 4
- Complete 1, 4
- Computer 2
- Contact 2
- Continue 2
- Convert 2, 4
- Co-PI 4
- Co-PI Info button 4
- Copy 1, 4, 7
- Costs 4
- Cover Sheet 4
- Create 1, 2
- creating PDFs 2
- D**
- Data 1, 2, 7
- Database 7
- Date 4
- Days 4
- default 4
- Delete 2, 4
- Disability 1, 7
- displays 4
- Document 1, 2, 4
- Document Done 1, 4
- Documents 1, 2, 4
- Download 2, 7
- dvips 2
- dvips 5.66a 2
- dvipsk 2
- dvipsk 5.58f 2
- E**
- Electronic 4
- e-mail 7
- e-mail notifying 7
- Embed 2, 4
- Enter 1, 2
- Entire 1, 4
- Entire Proposal 1, 4
- Ethnicity 1, 7
- Exit 1, 2
- F**
- FAQs 1, 2, 4, 7
- FAQs Introduction 1
- FastLane 1, 2, 4, 7
- FastLane Application 2
- FastLane displays 4
- FastLane uses 2
 - Secure Server 2
- Field 1, 2
- Files 1, 2, 4
- Files With 2
- Fit 4
 - Page 4
- Fonts 2, 4
- Form Preparation 4
- Form Preparation Screen 4
- Format 1, 2
- Forms 1, 4, 7
- From 1, 2, 4
- G**
- Gender 1, 7
- General 1, 2
- generate 7
- GO button 4

GPG	4	Not Use	2, 4
GPG I.E.1	4	Notify	7
groff	2	NSF.....	1, 4, 7
groups.....	1	NSF accepts	1, 2
H		NSF prints.....	1, 4
Help	4	NSF process	7
High Resolution Graphics/Other		NSF Program	7
Graphics Where Exact	4	NSF Proposal	4, 7
High Resolution Graphics/Other		Number	4
Graphics Where Exact Color	4	NX	2
High Resolution Graphics/Other		O	
Graphics Where Exact Color		Only	2
Representation Is Required For	4	Options	4
High Resolution Graphics/Other		organization's	2
Graphics Where Exact Color		Organizational	1, 7
Representation Is Required For		Other	4
Proper Interpretation	4	Other Information	4
Higher	2	P	
high-resolution	4	Page	1, 4
How	1, 2, 4	Fit.....	4
How Do	1, 2, 4	PARS.....	7
https.....	2	PDF.....	1, 2, 4
I		PDF file.....	2, 4
i.e.....	1, 4	PDF Format.....	4
If 1, 2, 4, 7		PDF Version 1.2	1, 2
In	1, 2, 4, 7	PDF Version 1.3	1, 2
Include.....	2, 4	PDFWriter	2
Information.....	1, 2, 7	Personnel.....	2
Instructions.....	2, 4	PI	4, 7
Is 1, 2, 4, 7		PI/Co-PI	1, 4
is better.....	4	PI/Co-PI Information	1, 4
J		PIs.....	4
Job	4	Point	7
Job Options.....	4	Portable Document Format	2
L		PostScript	2
Last	1, 2	Print.....	1, 2, 4, 7
Latest.....	2	Print Menu	4
List	1, 2	Printers	4
Log In	7	Process.....	4, 7
logout	2	Processing Unit.....	4, 7
require	2	Program Officer	1, 4
M		programs.....	1, 4
Mail	4	Project	1, 4
make	4	Project Description	1, 4
Make Your.....	4	Project Reports	4
Message	1, 2, 4, 7	Project System Control	4
MikTeX	2	Proper Interpretation	4
MSWord.....	4	Proposal Preparations	1, 2, 7
My	1, 4, 7	Proposals	1, 2, 4, 7
my answers	1, 7	Proposals containing color	4
N		R	
Navigation	4	Reader	1, 2, 4
non-PDF file	4	Reason	4

Receive	2, 4	Support	1, 2
Remainder	4	System.....	7
Report	1, 4, 7	T	
representations.....	4	Technical	1, 2, 4, 7
require	2, 4	Technical FAQs	1, 2, 4, 7
logout.....	2	Technical FAQs Introduction	1
Required For	4	TeX/LaTeX	4
Responses	1, 2, 7	troff	2
Review and/or Submit	4	U	
Review System.....	7	Upload.....	2, 4, 7
Reviews.....	2, 4, 7	Use This Document	1, 4
S		An Error Occurred While Trying ..	1, 4
Save	2	User.....	2, 4
Screen	4	User Support.....	2
Section.....	4	V	
Secure Server	2	Version.....	2
FastLane uses.....	2	View.....	2
see	2, 4	View/Print	1, 4
Select.....	7	W	
Send	1, 4, 7	Web	2, 4
set.....	4	Web-based application.....	2
Settings.....	4	Were.....	4
shows	2, 7	What.....	1, 2, 4, 7
Software.....	1, 2	What Is	1, 4
SPO	7	What is happening	1, 4
Sponsored	1, 4	What's happening	1, 7
Sponsored Project Office	1, 4	Why	1, 2, 4, 7
Status	1, 7	Windows.....	2
Status Inquiry/FastLane.....	1, 7	Word.....	1, 2, 4
Step.....	4	Work.....	2, 4
stop	1, 2	Work On	4
Submission	4, 7	Y	
Submit	1, 4, 7	Yes	4
subsetting.....	2, 4	Your Organization's	2