Q&A Webinar

July 17, 2017 @ 1 PM EDT

Please submit your questions in the "Q&A" box
(scientific inquiries will not be discussed)

National Institutes of Health
Office of Strategic Coordination - The Common Fund

NIH DIRECTOR'S
EARLY INDEPENDENCE AWARD

https://commonfund.nih.gov/earlyindependence

Panelists

◈ Ravi Basavappa, Ph.D.

Program Leader
Office of Strategic Coordination
Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives
Office of the Director

◈ Becky Miller, Ph.D.

Health Specialist
Office of Strategic Coordination
Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives
Office of the Director

◈ Ellie Murcia, M.Ed.

Program Specialist
Office of Strategic Coordination
Division of Program Coordination, Planning, and Strategic Initiatives
Office of the Director

◈ Weijia Ni, Ph.D.

Chief

Risk, Prevention and Health Behavior Integrated Review Group

Division of AIDS, Behavior and Population Sciences

Center for Scientific Review

Early Independence Award Program

- Started in 2011

- Started because of extraordinary length of time typically taken for an investigator to get first NIH R01 grant (~42 years old)

- Graduate students and clinicians within one year of degree or clinical residency who wish to "skip" the post-doc

- Cannot be functionally independent at time of application

- Talented young scientists who have the intellect, scientific creativity, drive and maturity to flourish independently without the need for traditional post-doctoral training

- Up to $250k DC/year for 5 years

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Early Independence Award Program - implementation

- Each institution is allowed to submit up to only 2 applications

- Uses standard R01 application packet, but with applicants focusing on program specific topics

- Three to five letters of recommendation required

- Review process is similar to that of Pioneer
  - All applications sent for technical review
  - Panel selects ~30 of these for in-person interview

- Site visit first year to awardees' institutions

- Since still an experimental program, all awards remain as "OD" awards

National Institutes of Health
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NIH Director's Early Independence Award (DP5) Review Procedures

2018

Weijia Ni, Ph.D
Chief / Scientific Review Officer
Center for Scientific Review
National Institutes of Health

Review Stages

- **Receipt of applications:**
    September, 2017
- **Stage 1 Review by Subject Matter Experts:**
    October-December, 2017
- **Editorial Board consideration:**
    January-February, 2018
- **Interview and final score by Editorial Board:**
    March, 2018
- **Recommendation by Council of Councils, NIH:**
    May, 2018

Stage 1 Review

- **All the applications will be reviewed in one Special Emphasis Panel.**

- **All CSR IRGs (Integrated Review Groups) will participate in assigning expert reviewers to applications based on appropriate biomedical and biobehavioral science areas.**

- **Each application is assigned to 3 "mail" reviewers who are "Subject Matter Experts" to provide full written critiques and scores, modeling after R01 review.**

Scoring and Critiques

- **Assign an <u>overall</u> impact score (1-9, 1 being the best).**

- **Use the 1 to 9 scale to score each of the five criteria:**
  - ➢ **Significance**
  - ➢ **Investigator**
  - ➢ **Innovation**
  - ➢ **Approach**
  - ➢ **Environment**
- **Emphasis will be on "investigator" and "Environment" (institutional support).**

Review Considerations

- The Principal Investigator is at a very early stage of research career development, having just finished (or close to completing) doctoral training or medical residency. Preliminary data are not required.

- It is expected that the award will enable the Principal Investigator to start a productive independent research career and have a significant impact to the field. The Principal Investigator is expected to devote "almost exclusive effort" to conducting independent research.

- Biosketch and Letters of Reference are critical sources for evaluating the prospects and promise of the investigator.

- Institutional support and commitment are integral parts of the program. The specific details are contained in the "facilities and other resources" section.

Editorial Board Review

- **A group of senior researchers will form an Editorial Board to conduct a second stage review.**

- **Each Editor is assigned ~20 applications after Stage 1 review is completed. They will read the applications as well as the Stage 1 reviews, and assign an overall impact score to each application, using the 1-9 scale.**

- **The Editorial Board will meet in February to select 25-30 finalists to be invited for interview in Washington DC in March, 2018.**

- **The Editorial Board will meet on March 12-13 in Washington DC to interview Finalists.**

Board Considerations

- Is the Principal Investigator an exceptional individual with the scientific creativity and intellectual sophistication to launch and accelerate an independent research career?

- Has the host institution committed to providing the Principal Investigator scientific freedom, ample resources, collaborating faculties, and protected time to develop an independent research program?

- Who are the top outstanding applicants with the best research prospect for exerting a sustained impact to the field?

Resources

- **Early Independence Award Web site**

  http://commonfund.nih.gov/earlyindependence/index.aspx

- **Request for Application (RFA):**

  http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/rfa-files/RFA-RM-17-008.html

- **Contact:**

  Weijia Ni, Chief/SRO

  301-594-3292 (Office)

  301-237-9918 (Cell)

  niw@csr.nih.gov

Early Independence Award Webinar Questions

July 17, 2017

Institutions

1. How can I find an institution willing to support me?
   - NIH does not match or facilitate matches between potential applicants with host institutions
   - Potential applicant may approach an institution to ask them to be a host or institutions may recruit individuals they wish to host
   - Only two applications per institution are allowed
2. What type of position does the institution need to provide to me? There are several types of appointments that would fulfill the requirement of scientific and administrative independence, including research staff, adjunct faculty, and assistant professor.
   - NIH does not specify the type of position that should be provided
   - Investigator will control the budget for the award, along with the space and resources necessary to conduct the funded research project
   - The position will confer eligibility to apply for grants and other types of research support
   - The application must include a written commitment to an independent research position that will be activated no later than the start date of the award
   - Position should not involve significant teaching or administrative requirements imposed by the host institution
3. Are position/appointment types viewed equally during the review, or is one type of appointment preferred?
   - Reviewers are asked to evaluate the scientific environment the institution will provide, along with facilities and resources rather than the position name
4. What resources does the institution need to provide to me?
   - Independent research space, support staff, access to necessary resources, supplies and equipment
   - May provide full or partial salary support
   - The institution is expected to integrate the awardee into the faculty environment of the host department or other unit of the institution
   - Mentorship (equivalent to that provided to assistant professors) should be provided
5. What would a successful institutional support package look like?
6. What is the experience of successful applicants in selecting an institution? Do you have any recommendations in terms of when to begin reaching out to institutions and what information to provide them about the award?
7. How are institutions identified for the two application limit?
   - An institution is defined as an organization that has a unique DUNS number. For example, if a university-affiliated school of medicine, school of dentistry, and hospital, all have one DUNS number, that institution, may submit up to two applications in total. However, if each entity of that institution (school of medicine, dentistry, and hospital) has a separate and unique DUNS number, each entity can submit up to two applications per unique DUNS number for a total of six applications.

Eligibility

1. Why is the non-independent research position described functionally rather than by title?
   - Positions may have the same title but serve different functions with different requirements or limitations
   - Describing functionally provides clearer boundaries
2. Can you describe the characteristics of a non-independent research position in greater detail?
   - Current research agenda is set through concurrence with mentors
   - Research is funded primarily through support to other investigators (mentored fellowships such as NIH F31/32 Fellowships or NSF Graduate Research Fellowships do not preclude eligibility)
   - Does not have any space assigned directly by the institution for the conduct of his/her research
   - Cannot apply for an NIH R01 grant without special waiver or exemption from the institution, according to institutional policy
3. Can postdoctoral fellows apply for the award?
   - Only if they have not served as a postdoctoral fellow for more than twelve months
4. How much time should be dedicated to the award project?
   - Awardees are expected to commit a large fraction of time/effort to activities supported by the award. At least 9.6 person-months (80% effort) is required for the first 2 years. In the final 3 years, effort may be reduced toward the award project, but the total effort towards independent research must still be at least 9.6 person-months (80% effort).

Application & Submission

1. The Research Strategy portion of the application includes 10 subsections (e.g., rationale for omitting the post-doc phase, approach). How much of the 12 pages should be allocated to each of these sections? For example, should the research strategy be equally weighted between description of the applicant/environment and the proposed research, or should the proposed research make up the majority of the Research Strategy?
2. Should section D of the PI Biosketch address Research Support or Scholastic Achievement?
3. Is there a page limit to the "Facilities & Other Resources" section where the institution fills out its information?
4. Can pre-doc or prior mentors be collaborators on the project proposal? Or is this seen as a sign that the applicant is unprepared for this type of an award and needs further training?

Budget

1. What is the salary cap/salary guidance for Early Independence positions?
   - NIH does not specify salary requirements; between the applicant and institution
   - Budget also needs to include project expenses like personnel (including co-investigators, collaborators, and consultants), supplies, equipment, subcontracts, and other allowable costs

Letters of Reference

1. Who should I ask for a Letter of Reference?
   - Referees should be able to address the candidate's scientific, leadership, and management skills and how he/she is qualified to conduct successful independent

research. It may not be best to choose referees based primarily on their official position, such as your departmental chair or institutional dean.

2. What is the difference between a Letter of Reference and a Letter of Support?
   - Letters of reference are typically from scientists or other people qualified to evaluate the merit of the project proposal and the applicant's qualifications to fulfill the proposed project. Letters of support are typically from outside individuals or organizations whose cooperation, assistance, or guidance is needed for the applicant to successfully complete the project. The letter of support affirms the person or entity's commitment of promised assistance to the project.

Review

1. Who reviews my application?
1. What will reviewers focus on the most? What types of criteria are used to assess the applicant (i.e., number of publications, history of being successfully funded (dissertation awards, training grants), etc)?
2. Will a subject expert review my application?
3. What should my talk focus on during the interview – the project or my qualifications?