June 8, 2017

Launching the Next Generation Researchers Initiative to Strengthen the Biomedical Research Enterprise

In May, I wrote about NIH's plans to establish a policy to address a biomedical research workforce dangerously out of balance by using a new measure called the Grant Support Index (GSI). Over the past month, we've been soliciting feedback on these plans from the scientific community through various avenues, including advisory council and stakeholder discussions, comments on Dr. Michael Lauer's Open Mike blog, and emails that my colleagues and I have received directly. We heard overwhelming agreement that some type of action was needed to stabilize the biomedical research workforce by bolstering NIH funding support for the next generation of researchers. However, we also heard significant concerns about the GSI methodology for assessing research impact, and the potential for application of a GSI-based cap on total support to discourage team science, complex trials, research networks, and the support of infrastructure and training. As a result, we are shifting toward a bold, more focused approach to bolster support to early- and mid-career investigators while we continue to work with experts on approaches to evaluate our research portfolio. In recognition of the call for such action in the 21st Century Cures Act, we are naming this effort the Next Generation Researchers Initiative.

Toward that end, the Next Generation Researchers Initiative will:

- free up substantial funds from NIH's base budget, beginning this year with about $210 million, and ramping to approximately $1.1 billion per year after five years (pending availability of funds) to support additional meritorious early-stage investigators, as well as mid-career investigators (those with ≤ 10 years as a principal investigator who are about to lose all NIH funding or are seeking a second award for highly meritorious research);
- track the impact of NIH Institute and Center funding decisions for early- and mid-career investigators with fundable scores to ensure this new strategy is effectively implemented in all areas of research;
- place greater emphasis on current NIH funding mechanisms aimed at early- and mid-career investigators, such as the NIH Common Fund New Innovator Awards the National Institute of General Medicine Sciences Maximizing Investigators' Research Award (MIRA), the National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research Sustaining Outstanding Achievement in Research (SOAR) Award, and other special awards from specific institutes, with an aim of funding most early-career investigators with applications that score in the top 25th percentile;
- encourage multiple approaches to develop and test metrics that can be used to assess the impact of NIH grant support on scientific progress.

We've launched a new web page, which will be a central place for information about the development and implementation of the Next Generation Researchers Initiative. I look forward to our continued discussion on this important issue. You can provide feedback through the Open Mike blog or send an email to publicinput@od.nih.gov(link sends e-mail). Ultimately, we have a collective interest in ensuring the U.S.'s long-term leadership in biomedical research.We've

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https://www.nih.gov/about-nih/who-we-are/nih-director/statements/launching-next-generation-researchers-initiative-strengthen-biomedical-research-enterprise