

News from the National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS)¹

HOW DOES THE NIGMS SUPPORT PROGRAM PROJECT GRANTS? WHERE IS CURRENT INFORMATION AVAILABLE ABOUT THIS MECHANISM?

The program project (PO1) research grant mechanism is designed to support research where the funding of several projects as a group offers significant scientific advantages over support of these same projects as individual research grants. Successful program projects bring scientists together (who might not otherwise collaborate) to apply complementary approaches to a well-defined problem.

A program project grant usually consists of three to five individual projects from different investigators. The scientist designated as the principal investigator has responsibility for the overall scientific leadership and fiscal management of the grant. The principal investigator, and each individual project leader, must demonstrate in the written application that the grant will be much more effective if funded as a program than if funded as independent research projects. Successful program projects establish effective collaborations, particularly in emerging areas of research, that extend beyond the duration of the program itself. Hence, a program project generally has a finite lifetime, and justification is required for the renewal of support beyond the initial funding period. Since it is not unusual for principal investigators on individual research grants to share techniques, information, and methods, it is not sufficient that the projects be unified by a common theme. Program project grants can support essential shared core facilities, e.g., major equipment, although the need of a group of investigators for a major piece of instrumentation or core facility does not itself provide sufficient justification for a program project grant. Program project grants are not intended to be vehicles for departmental support, or for research support of a senior investigator and several postdoctoral and research associate-level scientists. The program project and each individual project should represent a significant effort on the part of the participating scientists and be distinct from other funded efforts. Investigators can also participate as associate members, and have full use of any core facilities and contribute to the overall collegiality of the program, but derive no financial support.

The program project grant application should be structured as a series of separate but related project proposals. There is an upper limit of \$4,000,000 (exclusive of any subcontractual F & A costs) that can be requested in a competing program

project application to the NIGMS. If justified, additional funds can be requested for major pieces of instrumentation. An introductory section must contain justification for the program project grant mechanism and describe the goals that are not readily attainable through individual research grants. There should be a description of the objectives of the program as a whole, the relationship of the individual research projects to the entire program project, and the special benefits to be achieved by funding as a program project grant.

The individual projects, as well as the program project grant as a whole, must meet the same standards of scientific merit as regular research grants. Final review and recommendations by the National Advisory General Medical Sciences Council will also take into account the relevance of the program to the interests and mission of NIGMS. It is possible that funding for some individual projects or core components recommended by the initial review group may be deleted by Council or by NIGMS staff prior to award of a grant, based upon the lesser scientific merit of certain components or their lack of cohesion with the rest of the program project.

NIGMS supports research in the broad scientific areas of its divisions: Pharmacology, Physiology, and Biological Chemistry; Cell Biology and Biophysics; and Genetics and Developmental Biology. NIGMS's policies regarding program projects are described in the announcement SUPPORT OF PROGRAM PROJECT GRANTS, NIH Guide to Grants and Contracts, Volume 25, Number 10, March 29, 1996, which is available on the NIGMS home page at <http://www.nih.gov/nigms> under the headings Funding Info, then Program Announcements. Program project grants are investigator-initiated, but because of budgetary constraints, they may be restricted to areas of special interest to the individual divisions within NIGMS. Potential applicants are urged to contact NIGMS program staff listed in the program announcement for advice in the appropriate scientific areas, and for guidance in preparation of the application.

Future topics for this column: exploratory grants for high risk/high impact research, training grants at the NIGMS, and your suggestions

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