

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

PART II. WHAT DO REVIEWERS CONSIDER WHEN EVALUATING INSTITUTIONAL RESEARCH TRAINING PROGRAM GRANT APPLICATIONS (T32s) TO THE NIGMS?

NIGMS supports multidisciplinary training in biomedical research under the National Research Service Awards (NRSA) Act. This is the second part of a two-part series on training programs, and is an overview of what the peer reviewers consider when evaluating training grant applications to the NIGMS. Descriptions of the Institute's twelve predoctoral and postdoctoral institutional research training programs (T32s) in the biomedical sciences are found in the document "NIGMS GUIDELINES FOR NATIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE AWARDS," which is on the world wide web at <http://www.nih.gov/grants/guide/1997/97.02.07/NIGM-guidelines.html>. These extramural training program areas were described in a previous column. In general, it is the NIGMS' goal in its predoctoral programs to provide trainees with broad access to research opportunities across disciplinary and departmental lines. NIGMS also supports a small number of postdoctoral research training grants in the more clinically related areas of research training, in order to study problems of clinical relevance.

Applicants frequently ask how the training grant applications will be reviewed. There is a standing NIGMS initial review group called the Biomedical Research and Research Training Review Committee. Its roster can be found on the NIGMS home page at http://www.nih.gov/nigms/funding/brrtc_roster.html. This large group meets as a single subcommittee or as several subcommittees each review cycle, depending upon the number and breadth of the training grant applications to be reviewed that round. The NIGMS Office of Scientific Review conducts site visits for many, but not all, training grant applications, depending upon the need to collect information best obtained on site, workload, budgetary, and other considerations. It should not be assumed that a site visit will take place for a particular application, and all applications should be submitted in as complete a form as possible. Updated information is usually accepted by the NIGMS Office of Scientific Review, and this policy should be discussed with the scientific review administrator assigned to an application.

The instructions given to reviewers for NRSA applications are posted on the NIGMS home page at <http://www.nih.gov/nigms/funding/nrsatablesintro.html>. This is a useful listing of the items commonly considered by the reviewers on the NIGMS training review subcommittees, and it is reprinted below:

Items Considered in the Review of Applications for NIGMS Institutional Predoctoral and Postdoctoral National Research Service Awards

1. Program Direction

Origin and development of the program. Research leadership and experience of the program director. Adequacy of the program administration and advisory structure.

2. Participating Faculty Members

Composition of the faculty (by rank and distribution in different fields and departments). Mechanisms and criteria for inclusion. Current independent research grant support (competitive, national). Publication records. Nature and breadth of research conducted. Evidence of collaboration and cooperation among faculty members. Experience in the supervision of research training.

3. Training Program

Goals of the program and rationale for program organization. Mechanisms and criteria for the recruitment and selection of trainees. Mechanisms to monitor and guide the trainees. Nature and extent of research opportunities, courses, and seminars. Provisions/activities to promote cohesiveness of the program. Opportunities for collaborative research. Integration of medical and basic science training (where relevant).

4. Trainees and Candidates for Training

Availability of qualified candidates (backgrounds, academic credentials). Caliber of current and/or potential trainees and others identified with the program. Publication records of past and current trainees.

5. Research and Training Environment

Institutional support for the training program. Other sources of training support available. Facilities and resources available to the program (including clinics, where relevant). Numbers of predoctoral and postdoctoral students affiliated with participating laboratories.

6. Special Considerations (Items evaluated by the review committee but not included in the assignment of a priority score)

Efforts and achievements in recruitment of underrepresented minority students to the program. Training in responsible conduct of research.

This listing is not all-inclusive; some items may be of relatively little importance for a particular application, while other factors not mentioned in the list might be considered by the reviewers in a specific training situation. The application (PHS 398, rev. 5/95, Section V, Institutional National Research

¹ Future topics for this column: upcoming NIGMS/AAPS symposium, new program announcements at NIGMS, and your suggestions.

Service Awards, pp. V-3 through V-7) also instructs that various tables or lists be provided. A set of sample tables useful for compiling the data required for an application is provided at the web site under Sample Formats for Compiling Data Requested in National Research Service Award Institutional Training Grant Applications. Applicants are not required to use the tables, but they are simple and effective formats for organizing the requested material. Several of the sample tables incorporate data on minority recruitment, admission, retention, and completion records.

Overall, consider that the information for a proposed training grant program should be presented in a way that is suitable for the specific application and best conveys: (1) the goals and the effectiveness of the training program, (2) the training experience and research opportunities offered by the participating faculty members, and (3) the results of the program's recruitment and training efforts. Please note that each application must present a detailed plan to recruit underrepresented minority students into the particular training program described in the application, and the results of past efforts must be provided. Review committees will evaluate the adequacy of the plan and achievements in this area.

Questions about the programs for the institutional research training programs supported by the NIGMS should be directed to Dr. John Norvell at (301) 594-0533 or norvellj@nigms.nih.gov, and questions about the review process should be directed to Dr. Helen Sunshine at (301) 594-2881 or sunshinh@nigms.nih.gov. Other resource people are the specific staff members listed for a particular training program area as described in the NIH Guide announcement "NIGMS GUIDELINES FOR NATIONAL RESEARCH SERVICE AWARDS," referenced above.

Rochelle M. Long, Ph.D.²
*Chief, Pharmacological and Physiological
Sciences (PPS) Branch
Division of Pharmacology, Physiology,
and Biological Chemistry (PPBC)
NIGMS, NIH*

² Send comments on this column to: longr@nigms.nih.gov. NIGMS home page: <http://www.nih.gov/nigms/>