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The NIH Guide announces scientific initiatives and provides policy and administrative information to individuals and organizations who need to be kept informed of opportunities, requirements, and changes in extramural programs administered by the National Institutes of Health.

Vol. 15, No. 13, August 1, 1986
SPECIAL ISSUE--ANNOUNCEMENTS:
FIRST INDEPENDENT RESEARCH AND SUPPORT
TRANSITION (FIRST) AWARD (REVISED); AND
METHOD TO EXTEND RESEARCH IN TIME (MERIT) AWARD

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FOREWORD

THE FIRST INDEPENDENT RESEARCH SUPPORT AND TRANSITION (FIRST) AWARD (R-29)

THE METHOD TO EXTEND RESEARCH IN TIME (MERIT) AWARD (R-37)

During the last two decades, NIH grants for individual research projects (ROIs) typically have covered three-year periods - a marked contrast to the longer award periods of the 1950s and early 1960s. That peer reviewers and staff have grown reluctant to exceed the three-year tenure is not surprising. Both groups are mindful of the ever-increasing competition for NIH funds and the staff's obligation to allocate them prudently.

Yet, the three-year ROI often leads to inefficiency and instability, as noted in recent years by many leading scientists, including Dr. James Wyngaarden, the Director of the NIH. If the ROI recipient is a first-time principal investigator, for example, a three-year grant almost invariably means that he/she must seek renewed support at a time when, at best, there is only two years' worth of progress to report. Similarly, even an experienced principal investigator more often than not will be required to prove his/her worth again within three years. Longer grants (e.g., five years), at least on a selective basis, clearly would do much to reduce administrative burdens, make more time available for research, offer increased stability of support, and otherwise encourage able individuals to enter and/or remain in biomedical research.

While NIH encourages all ROI applicants to request five years of support whenever warranted and expects reviewers and staff to refrain from arbitrary shortening of award periods, we recognize that some special mechanisms are necessary to ensure more grants in excess of three years. Therefore, we are pleased to present in this special issue descriptions of the FIRST and MERIT awards for first-time and established principal investigators, respectively. Originally announced in the March 28, 1986, issue of the Guide, the FIRST award, by virtue of this announcement, now is available to a larger community and offers more flexible terms. The description of the MERIT award included here is the first public notice. We look forward with interest to the biomedical research community's reaction to these new funding mechanisms and expect them to be efficacious and efficient means to invest NIH research dollars.



William F. Raub, Ph. D.
Deputy Director for Extramural
Research and Training
National Institutes of Health

ANNOUNCEMENT

THE FIRST INDEPENDENT RESEARCH SUPPORT AND TRANSITION (FIRST) AWARD (R-29)

This announcement amends and supplements the previous one on the FIRST INDEPENDENT RESEARCH SUPPORT AND TRANSITION (FIRST) AWARD, published in NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts (Vol. 15, No. 4, March 28, 1986, p. 6-12). Please note particularly sections IIIC, D, G, H, L and V.

P.T. 34; K.W. 0710030, 0404000, 1014002

NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

I. DESCRIPTION

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is replacing its present New Investigator Research Award (R-23) with a new mechanism: the First Independent Research Support and Transition (FIRST) Award (R-29). The NIH will phase out the R-23 Award as presently funded awards terminate and will accept no new R-23 applications for review.

II. OBJECTIVE

The objective of this new award is to provide a sufficient initial period of research support for newly independent biomedical investigators to develop their research capabilities and demonstrate the merit of their research ideas. These grants are intended to underwrite the first independent investigative efforts of an individual; to provide a reasonable opportunity for him/her to demonstrate creativity, productivity, and further promise; and to help effect a transition toward the traditional types of NIH research project grants. FIRST awards generally will provide funds for five years during which time the newly independent investigator with a promising, meritorious proposal can provide evidence of significant and innovative contributions to laboratory or clinical science disciplines in biomedical research.

III. GENERAL FEATURES

- A. FIRST awards are not renewable after the five-year period.
- B. The total direct cost award for the five-year period may not exceed \$350,000. The direct cost award in any budget period should not exceed \$100,000. Indirect costs will be paid to the awardee institution in accord with applicable policy of the Department of Health and Human Services (DHHS).
- C. The authority to carry over unobligated direct cost funds from one budget period to the subsequent one under certain conditions will be a feature of this award and may be accomplished at the discretion of the principal investigator and the grantee institution. If funds have been restricted from expenditure by a specific term or condition on the Notice of Grant Award, they

a specific term or condition on the Notice of Grant Award, they may not be automatically carried over without the prior approval of the awarding unit.

Carryover is effected by notification on the financial status report which the grantee submits within 90 days of the termination of each budget period. Upon receipt of the notification, the awarding unit will issue a revised Notice of Grant Award which will reflect the increased authorization of direct costs. Indirect costs will be paid to the awardee institution in accord with applicable HHS policy.

- D. Grantee institutions may extend the final budget period of the project one time for a period up to one year beyond the original end date shown on the Notice of Grant Award. Such an extension may be made only when any one of the following apply:
1. additional time beyond the established expiration date is required to assure adequate completion of the originally approved project scope or objectives;
 2. continuity of Public Health Service (PHS) grant support is required while a competing application is under review; and
 3. the extension is necessary to permit an orderly phaseout of a project that will not receive continued support.

The fact that funds remain at the expiration of the grant is not in itself sufficient justification for an extension without additional funds.

The grantee institution must notify the awarding unit of the extension prior to the current expiration date of the project period. Upon notification, the awarding unit will issue a revised Notice of Grant Award to change the end date. Grantees may not extend project periods previously extended by the awarding unit.

- E. Only domestic organizations and institutions are eligible to receive FIRST awards.
- F. The principal investigator must make a commitment of time and effort to the project of at least 50% in each budget period.
- G. An individual may submit only one FIRST award application for any particular receipt date and may not submit concurrently any other type of research grant application.

The principal investigator may submit a traditional research grant application to continue and extend the research supported by a FIRST award. Support for other projects may be applied for and awarded subsequent to the receipt of a FIRST award as long as the principal investigator maintains at least the required 50% effort on the FIRST award.

- H. A limit of 20 pages applies to the following portion of the research plan: specific aims, background and significance, preliminary studies and experimental design and methods. The remaining portion of the application is to be prepared in accordance with the specifications shown on PHS 398 (Rev. 5/82), except for appendices. Applications exceeding this limit will be returned. Additional pages are allowable for material relevant to reprints, letters of recommendation and projects involving human subjects or vertebrate animals. If appendix material is submitted, three collated sets must be included with the application package. Identify each of the three sets with the name of the principal investigator and the project title.
- I. A FIRST award may not be used to supplement a project already supported by other PHS funds.
- J. Replacement of the principal investigator on a FIRST award will not be approved.
- K. Except for the special features described within these guidelines, all relevant portions of the PHS Grant Policy Statement apply.
- L. In exceptional cases, New Investigator Research Award applications which are awaiting a funding decision may be considered by individual awarding units for conversion to (or replacement by) the new FIRST awards. Principal investigators holding New Investigator Research Awards (R 23s) that still are in the early part of their project period may submit competitive supplement requests for conversion to a FIRST award or may submit a FIRST award application, depending on institute policy. For further information, contact the relevant program official listed below.

IV. REVIEW CRITERIA

Review criteria and procedures are based on the regular NIH system of dual peer review: evaluation for scientific and technical merit by an initial review group (study section) followed by a recommendation of the cognizant national advisory council or board.

Letters of reference, although not required, are particularly valuable where the investigator's research originality and potential for independent investigation are not reflected in his/her research experience.

V. ELIGIBILITY

To be eligible for this award the principal investigator must be a beginning investigator who is not in training status at the time the award will begin and who has not been designated previously as principal investigator on any peer-reviewed project supported by the PHS. (Exceptions: serving as principal investigator of a PHS Small

Grant (R-03), of a current New Investigator Research Award (R-23) in its early stages of support, of an Academic Research Enhancement Award (R-15), or of certain career (K) awards directed principally to physicians, dentists, or veterinarians with little research experience does not preclude eligibility.)

Subproject leaders on multicomponent awards, such as Research Program Projects (P-01) or Minority Biomedical Research Support Grants (S-06) may also be eligible, depending on the stage of their career development.

Potential applicants in any of these, or similar, categories are urged to communicate regarding eligibility with the appropriate contact person listed at the end of this announcement prior to submitting a FIRST application.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION

All awarding units of the NIH are authorized to use this mechanism.

VII. HOW TO APPLY

- A. Applicants must utilize the PHS-398 application form and must provide relevant information on eligibility (see V, above). The acronym "FIRST" should be indicated on the face page of the application.
- B. Applications must be submitted to the Division of Research Grants (DRG) in accord with regular receipt dates (February 1, June 1, and October 1).

The following table indicates the review and award cycle:

Application Receipt Dates	Initial Review Group Dates	National Advisory Council/Board Dates	Earliest Possible Beginning Date
February 1	June/July	September/October	December 1
June 1	Oct/Nov	January/February	April 1
October 1	February/March	May/June	July 1

VIII. PARTICIPATING BUREAUS, INSTITUTES, DIVISIONS AND CENTERS OF THE NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

National Institute of Child Health and Human Development (NICHD)

Areas of special emphasis or interest: Research relating to: reproduction; fertility-infertility; contraceptive development; demographic and behavioral population sciences; genetics and teratology; pregnancy and perinatology; infancy, childhood and adolescence; endocrinology, nutrition and growth; mental retardation and developmental disabilities; behavioral development; learning and cognitive development. Additional information may be obtained from:

Mrs. Hildegard Topper, Special Assistant to the Director
National Institute of Child Health and Human Development
Building 31, Room 2A03
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892
(301) 496-1848

National Library of Medicine (NLM)

Areas of special emphasis or interest: Medical Knowledge Representation; Expert Systems; Medical Decision Analysis; Medical Knowledge Management; Organization, Retrieval, Delivery of Information. Additional information may be obtained from:

Mr. Peter A. Clepper, Program Officer
Biomedical Information Support Branch
Extramural Programs, Room 5S-518
National Library of Medicine
Bethesda, MD 20894
(301) 496-4221

National Institute of Environmental Health Sciences (NIEHS)

Areas of special emphasis or interest: Toxicology of environmental pollutants, including pulmonary effects of all pollutants; immunologic, endocrinologic and neurologic effects of toxic chemicals; studies of mutagenic effects of xenobiotics; epidemiologic studies of environmental pollutants; toxicology of aluminum; studies using non-mammalian methods for assessment of xenobiotic toxicity; toxicology of xenobiotics in special populations such as: aged, diseased, infant, maternal, asthmatics, etc. Additional information may be obtained from:

Dr. Edward Gardner, Science Administrator
Extramural Programs, NIEHS
P.O. Box 12233
Research Triangle Park, North Carolina 27709
(919) 541-7724

National Institute of Dental Research (NIDR)

Areas of special emphasis or interest: All research programs of the Institute. Additional information may be obtained from:

Dr. Marie U. Nylen, Director
Extramural Programs
National Institute of Dental Research
Westwood Building, Room 503
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892
(301) 496-7723

National Institute of Diabetes, and Digestive and Kidney Diseases (NIDDK)

Areas of special emphasis or interest: All research programs of the Institute. Additional information may be obtained from:

Dr. Walter Stolz, Director
Division of Extramural Activities
National Institute of Diabetes, and Digestive and Kidney
Diseases
Westwood Building, Room 657
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892
(301) 496-7277

National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases
(NIAMS)

Areas of special emphasis or interest: All research programs of the
Institute. Additional information may be obtained from:

Dr. Steven J. Hausman, Deputy Director
Extramural Activities Program
Westwood Building, Room 403
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892
(301) 496-7495

National Institute of General Medical Sciences (NIGMS)

Areas of special emphasis or interest: All research programs of the
Institute. Additional information may be obtained from:

Dr. David Wolff, Deputy Associate Director
Office of Program Activities
National Institute of General Medical Sciences
Westwood Building, Room 955
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892
(301) 496-7063

National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute (NHLBI)

Areas of special emphasis or interest: All research programs of the
Institute. Additional information may be obtained from:

Dr. Henry G. Roscoe, Deputy Director
Division of Extramural Affairs
National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute
Westwood Building, Room 7A17
Bethesda, MD 20892
(301) 496-7225

National Institute of Neurological and Communicative Disorders
and Stroke (NINCDS)

Areas of special emphasis or interest: All research programs of the
Institute. Additional information may be obtained from:

Dr. Donald H. Luecke, Deputy Director
Extramural Activities Program
National Institute of Neurological and Communicative Disorders
and Stroke

Federal Building, Room 1016
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892
(301) 496-4188

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases (NIAID)

Areas of special emphasis or interest: All research programs of the Institute. Additional information may be obtained from:

Dr. Luz A. Froehlich, Deputy Director
Extramural Activities Program
National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases
National Institutes of Health
Westwood Building, Room 703
Bethesda, MD 20892
(301) 496-7688

National Cancer Institute (NCI)

Areas of special emphasis or interest: All research programs of the Institute. Additional information may be obtained from:

Mr. Hernon Fox, Referral Officer
National Cancer Institute
Westwood Building, Room 828
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892
(301) 496-3428

National Eye Institute (NEI)

Areas of special emphasis or interest: All research programs of the Institute. Additional information may be obtained from:

Dr. Israel A. Goldberg, Deputy Associate Director
National Eye Institute
Building 31, Room 6A51
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892
(301) 496-5983

National Institute on Aging (NIA)

Areas of special emphasis or interest: All research programs of the Institute. Additional information may be obtained from:

Dr. Alan L. Pinkerson, Acting Associate Director
Office of Extramural Affairs
National Institute on Aging
Building 31, Room 5C05
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892
(301) 496-9374

Division of Research Resources (DRR)

Areas of special emphasis or interest:

The following are research areas appropriate to the DRR interests: (1) Research and Development in Instrumentation and Specialized Technologies for Biomedical Research. This encompasses instruments, devices, and processes to facilitate research in biomolecular and cellular structure and function. (Instrumentation includes mass spectrometry, nuclear magnetic resonance, electron spin resonance, equipment for fast kinetic research, X-ray diffraction, electron microscopy, and flow cytometry.) The application of computer science, computer engineering, and biomedical engineering to biomedical research problems is also of interest. (This includes knowledge engineering, information technology, computer graphics, image processing, computer modeling and simulation, task-dedicated computer systems, and development of implantable microsensors and transducers.); (2) Research in Laboratory Animal Sciences. (This includes the etiology, pathogenesis, and control of laboratory animal diseases, as well as the environmental requirements of laboratory animals.); and (3) Development of Biomedical Research Methods Employing Lower Organisms, Tissues/Cells in Culture, or Mathematical and Computer Simulations.

Additional Information may be obtained from:

Dr. James F. O'Donnell, Deputy Director
Division of Research Resources
Building 31, Room 5B03
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892
(301) 496-6023

National Center for Nursing Research (NCNR)

Areas of special emphasis or interest: All research areas pertinent to nursing. Additional information may be obtained from:

Dr. Doris Bloch
Acting Director, Division of Extramural Programs
National Center for Nursing Research
Building 38A, Room B2E17
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20892
496-0526

ANNOUNCEMENT

THE METHOD TO EXTEND RESEARCH IN TIME (MERIT) AWARD (R-37)

NATIONAL INSTITUTES OF HEALTH

I. SUMMARY

Beginning in July of 1986, the NIH will offer a limited number of MERIT awards to selected investigators who have demonstrated superior competence and outstanding productivity during their previous research endeavors. The principal feature of the MERIT award is to relieve the selected applicant from writing frequent renewal applications by providing the opportunity to gain up to ten years of support in two segments. Specifically, an initial 5-year award is accompanied by an opportunity for an extension of from 3-5 more years, based on an expedited review of the accomplishments during the initial period. After the evaluation by the initial review groups the cognizant national advisory council/board and staff will further review competing R-01 applications for the purpose of selecting MERIT awardees. Investigators may not apply for MERIT awards.

To obtain an extension of the MERIT award past the initial five years of support, awardees must submit, at a time specified by the awarding unit, a progress report, along with a 1-page abstract of the research plan for the extension period and a proposed budget. Program staff and the national advisory council/board will review this material and determine whether the awardee will receive an extension and, if so, for how long (3-5 years).

II. OBJECTIVE

The objective of the MERIT award is to provide long-term stable support to investigators whose research competence and productivity are distinctly superior and who are likely to continue to perform in an outstanding manner. The provision of long-term, stable support to such investigators should foster their continued creativity and spare them the administrative burdens associated with preparation and submission of research grant applications. The concomitant decrease in the frequency of competitive reviews also will lessen the workload of NIH review committees and staff.

III. GENERAL FEATURES

- A. The MERIT program will apply only to individual research project grants (R-01s), exclusive of cooperative ventures such as clinical trials involving multiple institutions.
- B. Investigators may not apply for a MERIT award. Competing applications, by established investigators, prepared and submitted in accord with conventional NIH procedures, will be the basis upon which NIH staff and advisors identify individuals to

be offered a MERIT award.

- C. Only those principal investigators who accept a MERIT award will be eligible for extension based on expedited review of their achievements.
- D. Supplemental applications will not be considered a basis for MERIT awards, but MERIT awardees are eligible to apply for and receive competitive supplements.
- E. The research funded by the MERIT award should be in an area for which the investigator is well known for his/her scientific achievements and be the investigator's principal scientific endeavor.
- F. Unexpended funds in any budget period of a MERIT award (other than the last) will remain available to the investigator in the subsequent budget period, i.e., there will be automatic carryover of unexpended funds throughout the entire period of the award.

Carryover of unobligated direct costs may be accomplished at the discretion of the principal investigator and the grantee institution. If funds have been restricted from expenditure by a specific term or condition on the Notice of Grant Award, they may not be automatically carried over without the written prior approval of the awarding unit.

Carryover is effected by notification on the financial status report which the grantee submits within 90 days of the termination of each budget period. Upon receipt of the notification, the awarding unit will issue a revised Notice of Grant Award which will reflect the increased authorization of direct costs. Indirect costs will be paid to the awardee institution in accord with applicable HHS policy.

- G. A MERIT awardee may transfer his/her MERIT grant to another institution in accordance with grant policies of the Public Health Service. The investigator should contact the awarding unit as soon as possible.

IV. REVIEW PROCEDURES AND CRITERIA

A. The MERIT Award:

1. NIH staff and initial review groups will review all competing applications for R-01 research projects in the usual manner.
2. Subsequent to the evaluation of the applications by the initial review groups, program staff and/or members of the cognizant national advisory council/board will identify candidates for the MERIT award, based on the criteria for eligibility listed below.

3. The cognizant council/board will then review staff reports on these candidates and will make recommendations to the institute director.
4. The institute director will make the selection and will announce the award to each successful candidate, along with information on the attributes of the award, such as automatic carryover, and an indication of when the special progress report will be due.

B. The MERIT Award Extension:

1. To initiate consideration for a MERIT award extension the MERIT awardee must submit the following documents for review by program staff and the cognizant national advisory council/board: an 8-page progress report (essentially identical in format to that which routinely is required within requests for competing continuation grants), a 1-page abstract of the research plan for the extension period, and a proposed budget for the research plan.
2. After reviewing these documents and the ones related to the initial selection of the awardee, the council/board will make recommendations to the institute director on whether or not the MERIT awardee should receive a 3-5 year extension of his/her project, along with a recommended budget level.
3. The institute director or his/her designated representative will inform the MERIT awardee of his/her decision. If an extension is granted, the communication also will specify the length of time of the extension and the approved budget.
4. If the MERIT awardee does not receive an extension, he or she may then submit an application for review as a regular competing research grant application. Awardees will receive a decision on the extension early enough for them to submit a regular competing application with a view to avoiding a gap in funding should the institute director not award the extension.

V. ELIGIBILITY

The candidates must meet all three of the following criteria:

- A. The candidate must be principal investigator on a competing R-01 research grant application (new or continuation) that has been approved by a council/board for 5 years of support with an excellent priority score (e.g., one that is in the first two deciles).
- B. The candidate must have an impressive record of scientific achievement as the leader of one or more investigator-initiated

research projects.

- C. The candidate must be working actively in a research area that is of special importance or promise.

VI. IMPLEMENTATION

All awarding units of the NIH that make individual research project grants (R-01s) are authorized to use this mechanism.* Investigators selected as MERIT awardees will receive notification after July 1, 1986. The MERIT award will carry the activity code R-37.

- * Since the National Institute of Neurological and Communicative Disorders and Stroke (NINCDS) presently offers the Senator Jacob Javits Neuroscience Award (similar to the MERIT award) to outstanding investigators in the neurosciences, that Institute does not plan to participate in the MERIT program.