

National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases

Bridging the Career Gap for Underrepresented Minority Scientists

Key Elements of a Successful Career Development Award (K)

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National Institute of
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K Award Overview

Seven different K mechanisms used at NIAID

- Mentored: K01, K08, K23, K25, K99/R00
- Un-mentored: K22, K24 (to be a mentor)

K applications reviewed by one of four NIAID Chartered Committees (not CSR):

- AIDS
- Allergy & Immunology AITC
- Microbiology and Infectious Diseases
 - MID and MID-B

How to Approach a K application

- Plan early
- Decide which K mechanism is best for you
- Read Program Announcements
 - Pay particular attention to eligibility requirements and submission guidelines
- Contact Research Training Officer
 - Katrin Eichelberg, Office of Research Training and Special Programs, NIAID
- Discuss your research idea with your Program Officer

Components of K application

- Candidate's Background
- Career Goals and Objectives
- Career Development/Training Activities During Award Period (Career Development Plan)
- Statements of Support
- Research Plan
- Institutional Environment description/Institutional Commitment letter
- Letters of Recommendation (3-5)

Key Points

Candidate's Background

- Productivity: publications, awards, fellowships
- Research record: focused and high quality
- Apparent commitment to independent research career

Career Development Plan and Career Goals and Objectives

- Align career goals with research plan
- Understand your strengths and deficiencies
- Justify areas of needed training
- Be specific; individualize your plan
- Involve your mentor
- Provide a specific timeline and pathway for independence (R01 submission/goals)
- Plan for evaluation of progress (with mentors)

Statements of Support

- Mentor(s):
 - Clear plan for meeting with mentees, evaluation
 - Mentor's training record
 - Mentor's expertise
 - Research support
- Collaborators
 - Include letters from collaborator(s) outlining their specific role in the project

Research Plan

- Grantsmanship
- Clear goals and approaches
- Feasibility
- Innovation
- Scope for long-term success
- Independent from Mentor's research
- Timeline
- Pitfalls and alternative strategies
- Scope/plans for an independent R01

Institutional Environment/Commitment

- Institutional environment:
 - List relevant research resources
 - Opportunities for collaboration and training

- Institutional commitment (one page)
 - Commitment to candidate and his/her independent research career
 - Research support: space, equipment, technician, supplementary funds for research

Reference Letters

- Submitted directly by the referees
- Allow adequate time for the referees to put together a well-tailored reference letter
- Minimum: 3 letters of reference; 5 maximum
- Must be received by the application submission deadline
- Make sure the letter is current

Review Criteria

- Candidate
- Career Development Plan/Career Goals & Objectives
- Research Plan
- Mentor(s), Co-Mentor(s), Consultant(s), Collaborator(s)
- Environment and Institutional Commitment to the Candidate

Common pitfalls

- Weak publication record
- Apparent lack of understanding of grant mechanism
- Vague/generic career development plans
- Research and career plans not well aligned
- Plans for training not well justified
- Lack of strong preliminary data to support the research plan
- Inadequate alternative strategies
- Lack of mentor training experience, research expertise or funding
- Weak Institutional support

General tips

- Plan early
- Be thorough
- Refer to ‘frequently asked questions’ on NIAID website for career development awards
- Follow through
- Application submission: Submit early, check for errors and completeness, contact eRA/Commons right away if there are problems with submission
- Evaluate your application after it has been submitted.
- Before Review: Post-submission materials (newly accepted manuscripts) Contact SRO
- After Review: Discuss your summary statement and future plans with your Program Officer

Thank you!

For information about NIAID K mechanisms please contact:

Katrin Eichelberg, PhD

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