Researchers and Public Up in Arms over Imminent Collapse of U.S. Biomedical Research

Leading American biomedical researchers and patient advocates from Johns Hopkins, the Cleveland Clinic, Penn State University, and Boise State University are raging against chronic underfunding of the National Institutes of Health. They allege that this has led to severe erosion of cutting-edge research, biotechnology industry growth, and diagnostic tests and cures for human diseases.

The Budget Scalpel and Medical Research

By ALBERT R. HUNT | BLOOMBERG NEWS
Published: February 20, 2011
NIH funding

• Largest funder of biomedical research in the world

• FY 2012 budget – 30.69 billion
  – 83% - extramural research program
  – 50,000 research projects at 2600 institutions

• FY 2013 budget – 30.72 billion
  – Senate appropriation committee
NIH funding

- NIH – categorical spending page –
NIH funding levels from 1995-2011

Speaking before a Senate appropriations subcommittee, Francis Collins (NIH director) said agency will likely fund only one in 6 grants in 2011.
What is the NIH doing about this?

• Reduce non-competing RPGs by 1%
• Negotiate budgets of competing RPGS to avoid growth in budget (1%)
• No inflation increases
• Establishing a process for “additional scrutiny and review of awards for PI with existing grants of 1.5 million or more”
What study section?

• Study section will make or break you
  – DO YOUR HOMEWORK !!!

• Make sure your study section “gets” your project and is excited about what you are excited about
  – Find right committee (and committee members)
What study section?
What study section?

• Once you have identified section – investigate committee members and ID who should review your grant.
  – Visit Websites
  – Pubmed search
  – Who will have expertise to evaluate and appreciate it?

• Can’t know for certain who will review – but better to know there is the expertise necessary on the committee
What study section?

• You can’t request specific reviewers in the committee, but spell out what expertise is needed to review your grant
• Can suggest outside reviewers as well (though the NIH doesn’t have to consider them)
What happens at study section?

• Assignment of grants to review
  – Anywhere from 2-6 grants assigned 1-2 months prior to meeting
    • Primary
    • Secondary
    • Reader
Study Section Review Process

– Overall impact
  • Likelihood for research to “exert a sustained powerful influence on the research field involved”

– Significance
– Investigator
– Innovation
– Approach
– Environment
Study Section Review Process

• Application then given a primary score from all reviewers
• At meeting primary reviewer briefly describes project and offers critique
• Secondary reviewer adds additional comments
• Readers yet more comments
Study Section Review Process

• Finally open for discussion and questions
• Scores revisited
• Range of scores to vote within (all members vote)
• Can vote outside range
• Any Human subject concerns
• Budget discussion
  – Doesn’t influence score unless you are severely underbudgeted – then your reviewer thinks you don’t know what it takes to do project
Study Section Review

• Write as though your readers aren’t experts in your field – odds are they aren’t
• Reviewers looking at whether grant “doable as is” – “we can’t write their grant for them”
• Don’t be arrogant or condescending
• Spell out why your project is going to change the world
• Make sure you have the proper collaborators – if you are submitting a translational or technical grant – make sure you have the proper expertise on the grant
Study Section Review

• Resubmission
  – Address all points made in initial review –
  – DO NOT ARGUE WITH INITIAL REVIEW- THE REVIEWERS ARE ALWAYS RIGHT !!!!!!!