

Hi Folks,

I had the opportunity this weekend to attend an AAMC briefing session given by Dr. Sally Rockey, Director of the NIH Office of Extramural Research (OER), and Dr. Barbara Alving, Director of the National Center for Research Resources (NCRR) on recent developments with the ARRA program funding. Once AAMC releases their presentations, I will post them on the UTHSC-H ARRA website.

<http://www.uth.tmc.edu/research/ARRA/ARRA.html>

The general tone was upbeat, this is still an amazing opportunity for funding of research but also the sobering recognition that there are going to be a host of consequences and complications some of which are going to impact NIH's extramural research programs for years to come.

Challenge Grants (RC1)

- * The submission deadline, April 27, has passed. NIH is anticipating they will receive approximately 20,000 - 25,000 proposals. They have 11,000 into their system but there are an additional 30,000 grant applications still being processed through Grants.gov. (not all are RC1 proposals) so they won't know the final number till these clear the submission system. The NIH has extended the "correction window" to correct errors in submissions that are system errors due to Grants.gov mistakes. This doesn't apply to errors that were made in the application by the investigator or submitting organization.

- * NIH is re-evaluating the funding for the RC1 program, currently they are planning to make up to 500 - 600 awards. You can readily see the payline is going to be in the 2% - 3% range.

- * the RC1's will be distributed for mail-in review in May and they expect the IRG groups to review the results in early July. The target for award decisions is July 31 with Notices of Grant Awards (NOGAs) to be distributed in August.

- * the NIH is still requesting volunteers for RC1 reviewers. They have recruited a large number of reviewers from the NIH Intramural research programs and from Europe (800 German scientists have volunteered to serve as reviewers)

- * UTHSC-Houston submitted 148 proposals by the deadline. A special note of appreciation to Johnna Kincaid, Jodi Ogden and the staff of OSP who worked tirelessly over the days before the deadline (including the weekend) to make sure all our investigator's proposals were submitted. I encourage those of you who benefitted from their efforts to let them know personally how much we appreciate their professionalism and dedication.

- * the NIH recognizes that with a 2%-3% payline there are going to be a huge number of unfunded proposals, many of them in areas of critical interest to the NIH. Many of these are likely to be re-submitted and regular R21, R01, P01 proposals etc for the February submission cycle. It may be worth strategizing as to how best to plan the transformation of RC1 proposals that don't make the payline into regular research grant proposals that will access funding through the NIH base budget. It has been suggested that the upcoming June / July submission cycle may have significantly higher paylines than those that will fall after the Challenge Grant decisions.

- * I am working with the research deans from the HSC Schools (and the associate director of the IMM) to develop strategies to support researchers who want to transform RC1 or RC2 proposals into competitive R21, R01 or P01 proposals. Any suggestions you may have will be welcome.

Grant Opportunity Grants (GO Grants - RC2)

- * there is a great deal of interest in this new mechanism for funding large research teams or

collaborative consortia (\$500K - \$multi millions)

- * NIH received > 1,000 letters of Intent. The number of proposals may be significantly greater since the LOI's were not mandatory
- * the NIH is currently planning to make approx 100 RC2 awards but they have identified a number of "signature initiatives", which are areas of special interest to the NIH. RC2 proposals that fall into the signature initiative category may be funded later in the ARRA cycle.
- * some Institutes have opted out of the RC2 GO Grant Program (NICHD is one I think). NIH is recommending that the proposals that would have gone to these Institutes be submitted under the NIH Common Fund designation.
- * NIH has extended the RC2 submission deadline by a couple of days to May 29.

Supplements (designated as ARRA T-3 awards)

- * This appears to be the largest category funded by most NIH Institutes. The NIH is planning to release the distribution of the different categories of ARRA funding by each of the Centers and Institutes next week but all indications are that supplements are the biggest part of the pie.
- * the Competitive Revision Supplements closed April 21. There has been a surprisingly modest response, <1500 proposals were received
- * the Administrative Supplements remain a major opportunity for funding. Different Institutes and Centers have specific rules and deadlines. Furthermore the rules for eligibility, last year of funding etc, have been relaxed substantially in the last few weeks. For those of you who have NIH grants this remains the best opportunity for additional funding. If you haven't already done so check with your Institute website and Program Officials for specific rules and specific opportunities.
- * the rules for expenditure of ARRA T-3 supplement awards are arcane and are spelled out in a recent notice (attached and also on the website). Of importance is that the supplements can be for 2 years and does allow for a 1 year no-cost extensions. They can outlive the parent award.
- * Summer Trainee supplements have been allocated \$55 million. The first announcements are expected next week.

Meritorious Grant Awards

- * these ARRA 2 - year R01's for previously reviewed grants are still a work in progress. Apparently the NIH has been surprised that many investigators have declined these two year awards in favor of re-submitting their original R01's . Folks are counting on the fact that the chance of a 4-year award tied to the NIH base budget (if it already has a good score) is better than a 2-year reduced amount ARRA award. It will be interesting to see how many of our investigators are impacted by this program.

New Faculty Recruitment Awards (P30)

- * there is a great deal of confusion in the research community about these awards because some institutes seem to want to fund an "open" search on the expectation that an eligible faculty recruit will be identified and other institutes seem to want to see a recognizable candidate for the award. When pressed, Dr. Rockey agreed that they had no idea which would be the preferred plan and said they were relying on the Study Sections to make wise choices !!
- * The HSC has completed the internal review of proposals for the P30 program and have selected 11 separate programs that will be submitted to 9 NIH Institutes and Centers. My appreciation to the research deans and faculty for helping make this a relatively smooth process

Equipment Awards (\$10)

- * The NCRR Shared Instrumentation Grant program RFA closed March 23. UT-Houston submitted 13 proposals. IRG's meet in June - July , the Council will meet in October and the start date will be April 2010. NCRR is not planning to change this timetable.
- * NCRR usually receives approx 300 proposals for the Shared Instrumentation Grant program, this year they received 1900. If they allocate \$150 million to this program they are likely to make 50 - 70 awards.
- * the High-End Instrumentation Grant program will close May 6. I am aware of 2 or perhaps 3 UT-Houston proposals planned for submission. NCRR usually receives 100 proposals for the HEI awards, this year they have received in excess of a 1,000 letters of intent to submit. They are planning approximately 20 - 30 awards.

Construction Grants (C06 and G20)

- * two teams of UT-Houston researchers and facilities folks are working on C06 proposals for build-out of shell space
- * a team is also working on a proposal for a G20, core facilities renovation project.

Reporting Requirements

- * This is an area of major concern to the NIH and the institutions. ARRA funding is being governed by OMB rules that will apply to all Stimulus Package funding. These rules require "transparent" accounting frequent and detailed reporting. In principle this is fine but in practice it is going to place a large and acknowledgedly burdensome set of conditions on investigators and staff. Congress has a legitimate interest in knowing how \$780 Billion of Stimulus Package Funding is spent. The problem is this is a very different problem when it is translated into the reporting on hundreds and indeed many thousands of individual awards that will be supported by ARRA funding.
- * All ARRA awards, including supplements, must be handled as separate accounts, they can't be commingled with the parent grant for instance. A technical requirement, but very burdensome, is that universities will be required to request draw-downs of federal dollars from each account separately.
- * there will be a quarterly reporting requirement that will include information on each ARRA award (including each supplement). I have attached a draft version from OMB on the anticipated elements in these reports. Of particular note is the requirement for a pretty detailed description of the project, the number of people hired and retained (each quarter) and what infrastructure has been improved, what progress has been accomplished and the overall significance of the effort. The latter is a big deal for NIH because they want to improve on their past performance during the "doubling" in which they failed miserably in convincing Congress that the money appropriated had resulted in any important advances that benefitted the health of the people. Those of you who receive ARRA funding should anticipate being asked frequently by NIH to share with them accomplishments of your research
- * some agencies are pushing to allow up to 0.1 FTE's to be allowable as a direct expense on ARRA funds for administrative support but this hasn't been accepted yet by OMB.
- * These onerous additional reporting requirements (the regular NIH reporting requirements will continue) will mean that researchers are really going to have to pay attention to the rules governing their ARRA funds and to work closely with the administrative staff to make sure the requirements are met. This is one of those times when the investigators and the university administration need to work closely together to manage a challenge imposed on both by the unintentional consequences of federal regulations.

We will keep posting updates on the UTHSC-H ARRA website. Please don't hesitate to let me and my staff or Johnna Kincaid and the folks at OSP know if you have additional questions or concerns about these remarkable new opportunities.

Best wishes

Peter

Peter J. A. Davies MD, PhD
Executive Vice - President for Research
University of Texas Health Sciences Center at Houston