**TRANSCRIPT**

**Webinar:** NIH Grants Process: A Walk-Through for Beginners

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Cynthia Dwyer: Welcome to today's webinar, the NIH Grants Process: A Walk-Through for Beginners. On behalf of my colleagues at NIH, we are so happy to spend some time with you today, even if it is virtual. I'm Cynthia Dwyer, your moderator for the event. During our time together, we're planning to answer many of the most common questions about working with the NIH and the grants process. And we'll be addressing as many questions as we can, throughout the throughout the event, many that you submitted directly in the registration and during the event and, and some that we actually get throughout our outreach activities. So, we expect, as I mentioned, thousands of attendees from across the globe tuning in live. And then we have many, that may not be able to get in and have reached our capacity, who will be streaming on YouTube. So, with that in mind, we will address as many of your questions as possible, but we won't be able to get, to all of the answers during this hour and a half. But we do hope that the resources we provide will help you on your journey once this one concludes. So, let's move on. So, let me tell you about today's lineup and what you can expect today. Our webinar is divided into two parts. First, we've created a video walkthrough of some of those important components of understanding the NIH grants process. Answering those questions like ... Where do I start? Who do I talk to? And how long does the process take? But just because it's a video doesn't mean it's not interactive for those of you who are on Zoom. We have a large team of NIH experts who are answering questions live in the back, in the background in our Zoom panel. So, if you're watching via YouTube, although the interactive portion is not available, we hope many of your questions will be answered once we get through, get towards the live portion of the event. Now, part two of our event, let's see if I can advance the slide here. There we go. So, part two of our webinar includes an hour with our team of NIH experts answering questions live. We'll also be including a game called Submission Policies: You Make the Call and finishing up with a lightning round of tips from our panel. So, let me just tell you how thrilled we are to have a lineup of experts from diverse roles at NIH, helping with the written and the live Q&A. From institute and center staff, we have program, review, and grants management with years of experience ready to share their expertise. In addition, we have NIH experts on NIH policies and systems, receipt and referral, and grants and funding tools, resources, you name it. So, we've got quite a panel that are ready for you today. If you are interested in learning more about our presenters, we'll introduce them once we get to the live portion. But you can also refer to the NIH Grants Events page that is linked in your reminder and your confirmation email. Now, just as important as our live on-the-screen panel is our panel that's behind the scenes. We have a very experienced team from the Center for Scientific Review and the Office of Extramural Research, ready to help with the Q&A. So, we know you're anxious to get to the core of this webinar. So, if you'd like to view more information, like I mentioned, check out the grants events page. Any questions or technical issues that you may encounter during the event needs to go in the Q&A box since our chat box is not live. I think we're ready. So, I say three, two, one. It's on with the show.

Welcome to the NIH Grants Process, a Walk-Through for Beginners. I'm Cynthia Dwyer, an Outreach Coordinator, and I'm thrilled to be joined by my colleague Sheri Cummins, a Communications Strategist. We are both in the Division of Communications and Outreach within the NIH Office of Extramural Research. Between us, we have decades of experience helping applicants and prospective recipients, just like you, navigate our resources. Today, we will be delving into some of the essentials of applying for funding from the NIH by exploring questions that we hear most frequently from those new to working with the NIH grants process. Basically, we want to help you put some of the pieces of the puzzle together to create the big picture of NIH. So, welcome, Sheri.

Sheri Cummins: Happy to be here. Thanks for having me.

Cynthia Dwyer: Well, let's jump right in. NIH is the largest public funder of biomedical research in the world. We funded about 59,000 competing and non-competing grants in fiscal year 2023, totaling 34.9 billion. And that's with a B, supporting research at more than 2800 organizations. It's a huge enterprise and the process of applying for NIH funding can be intimidating for applicants with little or no experience. So, Sheri, what do you suggest someone new to working with NIH start?

Sheri Cummins: Well, I recommend starting with our central resource, the NIH Grants and Funding website at grants.nih.gov. You'll find information on the application process, policy and compliance, funding opportunities, podcasts, videos, and lots of other resources in the upper right-hand corner of the site. Just below the search bar, you'll find a handy set of utility links. There's a glossary that can help you decode the NIH grant speak, including all the many acronyms we use.

Cynthia Dwyer: Yeah, we love our acronyms.

Sheri Cummins: Oh, indeed we do. So, many acronyms. I still frequently refer to the glossary. It's a great reference. The other reference I use all the time is our frequently asked questions. We have FAQs on nearly every topic and they're great for clarifying policy. And finally, if you have questions and you've reached out to your administrative officials and experienced colleagues and you're unable to find the answer online, we have a help link with general contacts that can point you in the right direction.

Cynthia Dwyer: And to me, one of the most important elements of working with the NIH is to understand its structure and the role that it plays in funding. When I started 25 years ago, I had no idea that the National Institutes of Health was comprised of 27 different institutes and centers.

Sheri Cummins: That's right. And 24 of those institutes and centers, or ICs, offer funding opportunities and award grants. NIH funding is made through the institutes and centers, and each one has its own mission, priorities, budget, and funding strategy.

Cynthia Dwyer: But Sheri, do you have recommendations for how a potential applicant can identify an IC that may be interested in their research?

Sheri Cummins: Sure. All the ICs have their own websites that folks can explore, and I encourage you to spend some time on those sites. But first, you want to narrow down the field a bit. We have a powerful suite of reporting tools, aptly named RePORT at Report.nih.gov. These tools allow you to explore decades of funded awards. My favorite is a tool called Matchmaker. You give Matchmaker up to 15,000 characters of text, which you can pull from your abstract, your specific Aims, or other source that describes your research, and Matchmaker is going to return the awarded projects that most closely match that text. The results include a bar graph along the top, identifying the ICs that funded those awards. And you can click on a bar in the graph and the results will automatically filter down to the projects funded by that IC. You can then drill into each specific project and read the abstract and other details to get a feel for what's funded, and it's important to know what's already been funded. You need to be able to set yourself apart. Also, at the top of the Matchmaker screen, you can even move between a projects tab to a Program Officials tab to get a list and contact information for NIH scientific staff, whose portfolios include the identified projects. Cynthia, it is really an awesome tool.

Cynthia Dwyer: It is, and this is a great segue to one of the top questions we hear. Who do I reach out to when I need help or advice? You mentioned that funding is made through the NIH institutes and centers, so it isn't surprising that most of an applicant's interactions with NIH will be with a team of staff at one of those ICs. That team includes the Program Official that you just mentioned, a Scientific Review Officer, and a Grants Management Officer or Specialist. The Program Official or PO, manages a portfolio of awards within the mission of a particular institute. They develop grant initiatives. They provide programmatic, scientific, and technical advice to investigators, and they monitor progress once an award is made. If you're an investigator, most of your interactions would be with a Program Official. Another role of the Scientific Review Officer, or SRO, is to manage or manage the scientific and technical review of grant applications, ensuring a fair and unbiased evaluation. They identify reviewers, manage peer review meetings, provide a summary of the evaluation in the form of summary statements, and SROs will become your primary contact after an application is submitted and up until the summary statement is released. If you're a grants administrator at your organization, then there's a good chance that you'll be chatting with grants management staff. This role is actually near and dear to me since it's where I started when my career at NIH. It's the grants managers that are responsible for the completion of the business management requirements of the applications. Your NIH grants manager will evaluate the application to ensure that compliance and all budget matters are resolved. Negotiate and issue the award. Oversee post-award fiscal and administrative issues and is your contact to help answer questions related to the terms and conditions of the award.

Sheri Cummins: That's a great summary. I'll also put in a plug for our Understanding Staff Roles page found under that help utility link we talked about. It expands on staff responsibilities, when to reach out, and where to find contact information at different stages of the process.

Cynthia Dwyer: Thanks, Sheri. So, let's spend a few minutes now talking about available opportunities and where to find them.

Sheri Cummins: Sure, we use notices of Funding Opportunities or NOFOs to advertise our grant opportunities. We previously used the term Funding Opportunity Announcement or FOAs, and you may continue to see that term in some of our older materials. So, it's important to know that NOFOs and FOAs are equivalent terms for funding opportunities. But regardless of what we call them, they contain or link to all the information you need to successfully submit an application. They have an opportunity description, a list of participating ICs, key dates like due dates, and expiration date. Award information, like whether clinical trials are allowed and any project period or budget limits. We have eligibility information for both the applicant organization and the designated principal investigators. For my international friends out there, we clearly indicate in that section whether foreign organizations are eligible to apply and any citizenship requirements for the principal investigators. They have opportunity-specific submission requirements, review criteria, award administration information, and scientific peer review and financial grants management contacts within the participating ICs. You can search through all of our grant opportunities in the NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts. We call it the NIH Guide for short, which is found on our Grants.nih.gov website. The NIH Guide is our official publication of notices for grant policies, guidelines, and funding opportunities.

Cynthia Dwyer: Yeah. Our funding opportunities cover a wide range of grant programs, including research, career development, training, fellowship, program project and center grants, and resource grants.

Sheri Cummins: Yes, and we identify these programs using three-character codes we call activity codes. For example, we use the R series for research grants with activity codes like R01, R03, R15, and many others. K01 is an example of a career development activity code, and our K series T 32, an example of a training code. You get the picture.

Cynthia Dwyer: Hopefully, that brief explanation will be helpful to understand the correlation between the type of program that an activity code is associated with. Now let's talk briefly about applicant organizations that have never applied for federal funding before and what's needed to get started.

Sheri Cummins: It's a very important topic. They'll need to register in multiple systems. First, the System for Award Management, or SAM, which is required to do business with the US government. Grants.gov, which is a federal-wide portal used by all federal grant-making agencies. All NIH grant applications actually flow through Grants.gov and eRA Commons, the NIH system used to securely exchange information with our applicants and recipients. And if you plan to apply to one of our small business opportunities, you'll also need to register with the Small Business Administration. We recommend allowing six weeks to complete all the needed registrations, so if you aren't registered, you need to get started now. And if you are registered, make sure your registrations are active. The System for Award Management does have a yearly renewal requirement, and letting it expire can prevent application submission and block awards.

Cynthia Dwyer: Mm.

Cynthia Dwyer: Sheri, at this point, let's go ahead and share with our viewers an overview of the steps that an applicant should take to prepare for the application process.

Sheri Cummins: Yeah. Many months before a due date, researchers should be well on their way to refining their research ideas. They should identify a potential IC, reach out to NIH staff to discuss their proposal, making sure it fits within the IC mission and priorities, of course, and develop a submission plan. That submission plan should include identifying the submission method you'll use to prepare and submit your applications. Grant application forms must be accessed, prepared, and submitted using NIH ASSIST, Grants.gov workspace, or your organization may have its own system-to-system solution. You can't just go to our website, download a bunch of forms and send them in. You must use one of those online systems. Your Office of Sponsored Research or administrative officials can provide some guidance, but if your organization is brand new to working with NIH, I recommend giving our own ASSIST system a try.

Cynthia Dwyer: And part of that planning is also pulling together an internal team. NIH awards grants to organizations, not to individual investigators. So, right off the bat, your team includes an Authorized Organization Representative or AOR. We refer to them as Signing Officials in the eRA Commons. The AOR is responsible for submitting the application and it's their electronic signature that is signing off on the terms and conditions of the grant on behalf of the applicant organization. Of course, you'll also have one or more project directors or principal investigators responsible for directing the supported project or program. You'll hear them refer to as PD/PIs. Now you may also have additional senior or key individuals. administrative staff or collaborators, and you'll want to identify some colleagues to review your application and provide feedback. And if they have grant or review experience, even better. Once you have your team in place, make sure everyone knows their role, the process that needs to be followed, and your timeline.

Sheri Cummins: Absolutely.

Cynthia Dwyer: And what about during the application process? Are there any key considerations or best practices that researchers should keep in mind, Sheri?

Sheri Cummins: Sure, I think really, just be realistic. Don't propose more work than you can reasonably do within the time and budget. Write a strong proposal that addresses the review criteria and the funding opportunity. And most importantly, read and follow all the application instructions.

Cynthia Dwyer: And, big question ... where can applicants find the application instructions?

Sheri Cummins: Well, there are three primary locations. Our How to Apply Application Guide, which lives on the Grants.nih.gov site. You're probably seeing a pattern here and it's linked within every opportunity, contains your general application instructions. It includes information on registration and submission options and rules for formatting attachments, and all sorts of other resources. And form by form, field by field instructions for completing your application forms. In addition to those general instructions, you'll find opportunity specific instructions in the funding opportunity itself. If the funding opportunity asks for something different than the application guide, you're going to follow the opportunity instructions. Despite all our efforts not to do so, sometimes we make mistakes, and when we do, we post corrective notices in the NIH Guide, and we link those notices to the funding opportunity. Also, many of our opportunities are active for up to three years and a lot can change in three years. When our policies or processes change, we again post notices in the NIH Guide. Instructions and NIH guide notices should be followed over both the funding opportunity and General Application guide instructions.

Cynthia Dwyer: Sheri, I think at this point we've laid the groundwork and it's time to dive into one of the biggest sets of questions that we receive at NIH. What's the application process and how long does it take to get my funding?

Sheri Cummins: Yeah, the process does take some time. Preparing a competitive application isn't something you're going to do in the course of a few weeks. As we mentioned, just refining your research idea before you even begin filling out an application can take many months, but let's start with the application itself. You must identify a funding opportunity of interest. Access that application, the application forms using one of the submission methods that we mentioned the NIH ASSIST, Grants.gov workspace or system-to-system solution. You'll prepare the application following all the instruct, the instructions, and the how to apply application guide and the funding opportunity, and any relevant NIH guide notices. I encourage you to take advantage of any pre-submission validation services available within your submission system. These services will systematically check many, but not all application requirements. It gives you a real good start. You should double-check the related notices section of the funding opportunity for any late-breaking changes before you submit and be sure to share your proposal with colleagues for feedback and perform any final internal reviews that you had planned for. Then and only then, are you ready to submit your application and many of the steps in the process can be done by organization administrators or members of the research team. And responsibilities may vary from one organization to another, but the submission step must be done by an authorized organization representative or signing official.

Cynthia Dwyer: But you're not done yet. Submission is not the last step in the application process.

Sheri Cummins: That's right. It's a very important point. After submission, you must track your application, which flows from your organization through grants.gov and on to NIH, where it's processed by the eRA Commons. It can take between a few minutes and a few hours to process an application. You need to track the application status. If errors are identified at Grants.gov or eRA Commons, your application will not complete the submission process and you'll need to correct the errors and submit again before the deadline. However, if your submission is free of system-identified errors, eRA Commons will assemble all your forms and application attachments into a consolidated document in a consistent format with headers and footers, a table of contents, and bookmarks. That assemble the application is visible through the status feature in eRA Commons, and going forward, you'll continue to use the eRA Commons to interact with NIH.

Cynthia Dwyer: Sheri, at this point let's just stop for a moment. There are a lot of steps, and we can't stress enough the importance of submitting your application early to address unforeseen issues and thoroughly check that final assembled e-application image in eRA Commons. And when we say early, we mean days, not hours, not minutes ahead of the deadline.

Sheri Cummins: Yes, I like to say measure early on a calendar, not a clock. Now, Cynthia, that assembled e-application is the same document that will be used by reviewers and staff for funding consideration. It's the applicant's responsibility to check it in eRA Commons and notify us of any assembly issues within the two days following the submission. And viewing that application in eRA Commons is the best way to verify NIH received your application and that it looks just like you expected it to. We like to say, if you can't view it, we can't review it.

Cynthia Dwyer: I love that.

Cynthia Dwyer: So, if I was a PI, I'd be anxious to know what's happening to my application at this point after submission and when I would find out about that funding. So, what's next?

Sheri Cummins: Well, after that two-business day viewing window, your application automatically moves on to receipt and referral staff in the Center for Scientific Review. Referral staff conduct additional compliance checks and then assign the application to one or more ICs and also to a scientific review group. The assignment details will show in eRA Commons status in about two weeks.

Cynthia Dwyer: So, now your application has been assigned. At this point, it's going to proceed through a two-stage review. The first level is called the initial peer review and is carried out by a scientific review group composed primarily of nonfederal scientists. However, it's administered by a NIH scientific review officer, an SRO part of the NIH team that we talked about earlier. And during this stage, the SRO would be your key contact. And you can find out who this is on that eRA Commons status page. Now. The second level of review is performed by the institute and centers national advisory councils or boards composed of both scientific and public representatives. So, now let's dive a little deeper into that first level of review. As I mentioned, the SRO manages the initial peer review. The reviewers are selected, the applications are assigned for review, and the study section meets and assesses the applications against the review criteria that is listed in the funding opportunities. This review results in a numerical value called the Overall Impact Score, which basically indicates how the reviewers judged the impact of the project on its area of science. The scores for the application are available within 2 to 3 days in the eRA Commons. Now, after the meeting, the SRO prepares a summary statement, which is a document outlining the official outcome of that review. This is available within about a month. Now, this is an oversimplification of the peer review process. We encourage you to view NIH videos and resources on the details located on both the Grants.nih.gov website and the Center for Scientific Review site at CSR.nih.gov. So, the summary statement is released in the eRA Commons. What's the next step?

Sheri Cummins: So, once the summary statement is released, the program official becomes your key contact, and they can help clarify points made in the summary statement. They can also provide advice on next steps if your application didn't receive a favorable score.

Cynthia Dwyer: During the pre-award and award process, and on throughout the life cycle of a grant, the program officer and the grants management officer or specialist work together, much like administrators and researchers in your own organization. The PO handles scientific and programmatic aspects of a project, and the Grants Management Officer handles the business and administrative aspects of the award. If you receive a score that is broadly in the competitive range, you may be asked to submit additional information through a process that we call Just-in-Time, and it's a function in the eRA Commons. This would be stuff like other support and additional human subjects and welfare animal welfare information. Just remember that the Just-in-Time request is not an indicator of award, but the information requested would need to be in place prior to making an award if it was chosen for funding. So, it behooves you to submit that information when we request it.

Sheri Cummins: That's right.

Sheri Cummins: Now that folks know about the initial scientific peer review of the application, let's talk about that second level of review we call council and what happens next. Each IC director chairs a national advisory council for their institute or center. This council recommends applications for funding, but it's the IC director who makes final funding decisions. If your application is selected for award, you will receive a notice of award which is viewable in eRA Commons. It takes about nine months from submission through to receiving that notice of award. The NOA is a legally binding document. It includes award data, payment information, the terms and conditions of award. When the recipient organization draws down funds, it is considered an acceptance of the award and associated terms and conditions. Those terms and conditions are documented in the NIH Grants Policy Statement, or GPS, which is which is updated yearly and can be found in the Grants.nih.gov site. It includes all the rules, responsibilities, and expectations for appropriate stewardship of a grant throughout its life cycle. Throughout the entire award. Recipients are responsible for managing the day-to-day operations of their grants, and NIH actively monitors awards through recipient reports and correspondence, audits, and site visits.

Cynthia Dwyer: Talking about the grants process in this way hopefully helps our viewers understand a little more clearly why this process takes nine months or so. So, Sheri, what advice would you provide to organizations that have applied before but haven't secured funding, or for those starting fresh in roles with little or no experience?

Sheri Cummins: It's essential to assess past applications and identify areas for improvement. Researchers should reach out to program officials to discuss summary statements. Seeking advice and guidance from colleagues can also be valuable. And for those a new role and new roles, take advantage of available resources and seek mentorship opportunities. These can all help navigate that learning curve.

Cynthia Dwyer: Thanks. Those are great points. We do encourage everyone to explore the resources that we've shared today, beginning with the Grants.nih.gov website and the CSR.nih.gov site. Don't forget about the NIH grants YouTube channel, our All About Grants podcasts, and to sign up to stay informed with our OER newsletter called the OER Nexus, and our social media. Now, as we wrap up our presentation, Sheri, do you have any final tips or advice for researchers embarking on the NIH grants journey as well as administrators?

Sheri Cummins: I would encourage researchers to approach the NIH grants process with patience and persistence. It's highly competitive. As we said early on, develop a submission plan and make sure your timeline allows for early submission. Cynthia. The grants process is stressful. There's no need to add to that stress by doing things last minute, and also utilize mentors and colleagues to review your proposal and help refine your grant writing skills. This could improve your success rates over time. For new administrators, they should reach out to colleagues, including those at other organizations. There are lots of societies out there that support administrators with learning opportunities and networking.

Sheri Cummins: And really for everyone, just build relationships with NIH staff and stay informed. You'll find information on our listservs and social media and the News and Events tab of Grants.nih.gov. And once you've identified ICs of interest, look for similar links on their sites too.

Cynthia Dwyer: Well. Thank you, Sheri.

Cynthia Dwyer: I've enjoyed our time together discussing the NIH grants process today. And for those of you viewing, we hope we've helped put some of the larger pieces of the NIH grants process puzzle together for you. Best wishes on your path to success. And thanks for plugging into NIH for this episode of Conversations and Connections.

Cynthia Dwyer: Oh, wow. Look.

Cynthia Dwyer: There you are again. I see our audiences. All of our attendees. We've got some good thumbs up and clapping and hearts and so that, uh, that's wonderful. And we're so glad that you stayed with us through that. And I know I did see some questions coming in. So, during that event so, thank you very much. So, now we are on to part two of our event, the live portion. You'll be spending the next hour with, not only myself, but our panel of experts. And during that time, we plan to, share, again, those the, a lot of the questions that came in live during our registration process and live and then our game I had mentioned earlier, which you definitely want to participate in our Submission Policies: You Make the Call. We'll go back and we'll finish up, our questions, and then we're going to wrap it up with a lightning round, from our panel of their top tips in 15 seconds or less. So, we'll see how that works. So, I think, DeRon, my tech guru, if you want to get rid of our slide and put our panel up, that would be awesome. I am going to, go ahead and introduce everyone and, all of our panel as I call out your name, if you don't mind, just waving. That would be awesome. So hopefully we've got Michelle Bulls. I'm not sure I don't see her yet, but she's the Director of the Office of Policy for Extramural Research Administration. Many of you know it as OPERA, if you have any experience with NIH. We've got Sheri Cummins, who you met on our, video while ago. She's a Communications Strategist, in the Division of Communications and Outreach, in the Office of Extramural Research, OER, where I am also located. We've got Kasima Garst, who is the Director of the Division of Grants Systems Integration, also in OPERA. Emily Linde, who is the Director of the Grants Management Program at the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases. We have Brittany Mason-Mah. Dr. Mason- Mah, who is a Scientific Review Officer within the Center for Scientific Review. Dr. Michael Sesma, who is a Chief Postdoctoral Training Branch Chief, and he is with the National Institute of General Medical Sciences, also known as NIGMS. So, you remember Sheri mentioned in that video all those acronyms. So, we're going to do our best to spell them out for you, but, if we don't, watch that chat. And then finally I would like to introduce Dr. Michelle Timmerman. She is Associate Director and Guide Liaison Officer within the Division of Receipt and Referral within the Center for Scientific Review. So, you're going to be hearing from each of them in just a moment. So, let's get started. I know that's what you're all here for. So, one question we often receive from researchers and administrators providing advice to faculty is about making connections with NIH and finding the appropriate contacts. So, in our earlier presentation that you just saw, we talked about a very useful tool called Matchmaker for finding the right program officer and institute or center for an area of research. So, I'm going to ask Dr. Sesma. Mike, can you dive a little deeper into why these tools can be so helpful for applicants? And if there are other ways to assess which IC, and I'm going to refer to it and you'll probably hear it quite a bit. We refer to institute and center as IC quite often. Which is the right fit, before they even start the grant writing process?

Michael Sesma; Yeah. Thank you, Cynthia, and welcome everybody. So, what one of the most important things to all of you as investigators or students out there is your time. And what these systems we provide to you and these resources is to help you manage your time so that you can spend the time with the person at NIH that's going to be able to provide you the most help and assistance in developing your ideas and turning it into a grant application. So, the tools like Matchmaker or RePORT and the institute websites, that information, those the search results will help you narrow down your, who, who you need to have a conversation with at which institute. You need to have that conversation. So, remember there are 24 institutes and centers with funding authority. And there's a lot of there is a degree of overlap between all of those institutes, institutes in terms of their mission. You want to find it's possible that your ideas might fit more, more than one institute. And so, the hit list that you get from RePORTER or Matchmaker is going to provide some, some hints about which institute is where your research would be appropriate. And you can also use that hit list to identify the program officer who's likely to manage grants in that particular area. So, right there, it saves you a lot of time. You're not chasing people by, by phone or email. And in fact, it gives you you're also able to find their email address so that you can send an email with an inquiry, and provide a little information with that email, provide your Biosketch, and provide some information about the project that you want to develop into an application, and what type of grant mechanism you're interested in learning more about. So, those use those tools to save yourself time and then identify the right person that can help you in the next steps.

Cynthia Dwyer: Thanks, Mike. I actually, you had mentioned a few things there that I key points and that was when we are talking with applicants, one of the most common questions is what do I need to share with the program director when I actually reach out to them? So, that was, some very good advice. So, I appreciate that. I'm going to just stick with you, and I'm going to ask you another question that came in from our audience. Would you mind sharing some of the advice that you discuss with trainees and others who are very early in their career? We've actually had quite a few, inquiries specifically from PhD students.

Michael Sesma: So, if you're a PhD student or a postdoc, one of the things you want to think about is how soon can I apply and what programs should I apply for? Are there institutional programs? In other words, grants that your institution has that are supported by NIH that you can be supported by? Are there individual mechanisms like a fellowship or some or a dissertation award that you might apply for? So, it's never too early to start thinking about. Hopefully you have resources and colleagues and classmates at your own institution that are perhaps recipients or applicants for these programs, and you should find out how they did it. Your institution should also have some information about that, as well as your department. So, think about it early, and then identify often the best place to begin searching for contacts for information about your particular research is to ask your sponsor, your mentor, your PI, which institute funds their work. So, that gives you an idea of where if your research is, closely related to what your PI is working on in the lab, that's a good place to start. Start with that institute, and you can go to that web page for that institute and identify the person that you want to talk. You want to talk to the one who handles fellowships, for that institute. And, you know, if that's not the right person, when you tell them about your research idea, you share your research idea, that that individual, that program officer is probably going to refer you to an institute that might be more appropriate for that particular project. So, you know, we talk to each other at NIH from one institute to another and within an institute. So, when we can't provide the right answer or provide the right advice, or we need to help somebody find the right institute, we will refer you to somebody else, that that is, going to be able to help you.

Cynthia Dwyer: Right. And I'm going to follow up that with one more question. Actually, it's a two-part question is, some of our attendees have heard about, about being an Early Stage Investigator. And so, we'd like you to share with them what would be the benefit of applying as an ESI or Early Stage Investigator, and how would they know whether they were eligible or not?

Michael Sesma: Well, an Early Stage Investigator, someone who is within ten years of the date of their final degree, their PhD or their clinical training. So, you're eligible as an early-stage investigator to apply for a substantial research grant mechanism in this case would be an R01, the gold standard for research grants at NIH or, at my institute, we have a program called the MIRA. So, you could apply to the MIRA R35 or the R01. As an Early Stage Investigator. Now, the advantages of applying as an ESI are in review considerations and in funding considerations. In review, the ESI applications are typically clustered together within a panel so that when the reviewers are talking about these applications, they're only talking about Early Stage Investigators in investigator applications at that time. Established investigators who were going to be, you know, probably a little bit more seasoned in putting those applications together, are going to be reviewed in their own cluster, their own group. When it comes to funding, most institutes have published a policy where early-stage investigator, there's a high priority to fund early make awards to early-stage investigators. So, if an institute has a fixed pay line, that pay line might be a little bit different than it is for established investigators. So, there's another advantage. I think those are the I think the other part of it is the meat of your application. Often the expectations for an established investigator within a grant application is that they're very productive. And there's an expectation for that in that productivity in terms of publications or, you know, clear outcomes of their research. I think with reviewers, looking at ESI applications, they're perhaps, willing to allow a little bit more understanding where that individual is in their career, in their independent career. So, an ESI is an independent investigator, usually a young faculty member within ten years of their terminal degree. And I've explained those advantages. Very important to consider those. And when you talk to a program officer, they will advise you in the same way.

Cynthia Dwyer: Great. Well thank you Mike. I appreciate it.

Sheri Cummins: Cynthia.

Sheri Cummins: Let me just add to that. the Early Stage Investigator is also someone who has not successfully competed yet for substantial funding. So, it's within ten years and also has not yet received any substantial award.

Michael Sesma: Thanks, Sheri, I forgot that most important part.

Cynthia Dwyer: Well, Sheri, thank you. And since your mic is on, I'm just going to turn the next question right over to you. And that has to do with some of our favorite things, acronyms - the NOFO, the FOA, the NOSI. We've been getting some inquiries about trying to understand what the difference is. So, do you mind sharing a brief overview of the different types of funding opportunities that are available?

Sheri Cummins: Sure. I can certainly give you some high-level information on that, but I do also want to give a plug for on our How to Apply Application Guide page. We do have a link out to a page specifically about understanding funding opportunities, and you can get more details there. But we talked about, you know, Notices of Funding Opportunities or NOFOs and the older term Funding Opportunity Announcements or FOAs. Just being broad equivalent, umbrella terms for funding opportunities. Okay. So, within that big umbrella term, you might hear of things like parent announcements or program announcements or requests for applications. So, of course acronyms, Program Announcements RPAs, Request for Applications are RFAs. Okay. parent announcements and program announcements are similar in that they use a standard due date schedule that defines, you know, three submission review and award cycles per year. They can remain active for up to three years. So, there are some similarities, but there are also differences. A parent announcement is really a generic announcement. It's really just, a way to provide the information and the logistics needed to accept investigator-initiated applications, whereas a program announcement is going to be more specific about a particular area of research that we're interested in getting applications in. The applications to parent announcements and program announcements, they really compete for the same funds in most cases. They don't have set aside funds. So, they're all competing for the big buckets of money. Whereas a request for application does have set aside funds, and the funding opportunity will clearly state what those, those set-asides are. RFAs (Request for Applications) are often a single due date, and it's a specific due date just to that opportunity. So, it's an opportunity-specific due date. So, some similarities, some differences. Really, you're just going out there finding the thing that fits. You know go find the funding opportunity that fits your research. Your, request for applications and a specific kind of program announcement called a PAS (Program Announcements with Set-Aside Funds). Yes. Another acronym. Those are the only ones that really have the set-aside. I don't know if there's anything anybody else wants to add to that, but that's kind of an overview.

Cynthia Dwyer: Great. All right, well, let's move right along. I didn't hear anything from anyone else. So, let's see. We'll take one more question here related to the funding opportunities. And this is for, Michelle Timmerman. Still on the topic of the funding opportunities, can you talk a little more about the content and where applicants may find special requirements?

Michelle Timmerman: Sure. And all of our funding opportunities follow the same general structure. So, once you understand one, you can understand them all. And most of the funding opportunities that you'll be reading are actually special opportunities for one limited topic, even though many of our applications do come into our generic program announcements. So, every word of a funding opportunity is important. It must be read and importantly, it must be followed. But NOFOs do have a few places that are more likely to vary. And again, the NOFO is the Notice of Funding Opportunity, which we used to call Funding Opportunity Announcements, which I used to call FOAs. So, in section one you'll see information about the specific scientific topics that are sought. Section 4.2 and we use Roman numerals, they have special application instructions. It's important to remember that comments won't give a warning, if you forget to follow these. Section 5.1 will explain the review criteria that your reviewers will be using. Now, some other sections that are also critical are that section three explains the eligibility. So, what institutions, what PDs/PI's are eligible to apply? Section one has additional information like whether a resubmission is allowed or budget limits. And right at the top of the NOFO in that first screen, you will see the list of the institutes and centers that are participating.

Cynthia Dwyer: Great. Thank you so much, Michelle. We're going to take on one more topic before we go to our interactive portion of the of this, live Q&A. So, and we're going to, discuss, we've, as I mentioned earlier, we've got plenty of attendees that have joined us from around the world. And so, this question, I don't see that Dr. Michelle Bulls was able to join us. So, I'm going to either Kasima or Emily, either one of you, if you, can join us in answering this, that would be great. So, this question has to do with whether or not foreign institutions can apply for NIH funding. And if so, under what circumstance?

Kasima Garst: So, Emily, I'll let you start off on that and then I can add in other stuff as well.

Emily Linde: Okay, Cynthia, that's a great question. And I think it's a great segue from what Dr. Michelle Timmerman has just covered, right? So, the first place that I would look is the eligibility section in the NOFO that's just been discussed. That specifically indicates whether a foreign organization can apply as a direct applicant and whether or not a foreign organization could be a, a sub awardee on that application. So, that's the very first place that I would look. If you have questions at all ever on your on, on a Notice of Funding Opportunity that you're reviewing, I certainly would encourage you to reach out to the contacts. All of the, NOFO have contacts and they will, they will be happy to answer questions. So definitely look at the notice of funding opportunity to see whether or not you're eligible. And if you have not applied before, I would highly encourage you to make, make avail of the resources available for foreign applicants. First time foreign applicants, make sure that you start your registration process early because that's very important. There is one extra step for foreign applicants where they have to fill out an NCAGE number and to make sure that you have all of that together. Long and advance, as Sheri mentioned, of applying and making sure that that's, that's in place. I would give one other piece of advice to foreign direct foreign applicants, and that is to really think about how you're interacting with the NIH. All of your interactions will need to be in English. Right? And so, if you are in a country where English is not the native spoken language, I would certainly encourage you to review the documentations and how you send, how you submit it, and how you register your applicant organization information. Because should you be successful in in being selected for funding and get an award, you will also need to be able to draw funds and all of your registrations need to match. So, be sure that you are looking at that through the process. And I believe there's 5 or 6 registrations that need to be completed, so do think about that when you're setting things up. Kasima, would you like to add some things?

Kasima Garst: Yeah, and everything Emily said was absolutely correct. I also just wanted to add as well, because I know there was a question in the chat about being able to search for funding opportunities within our NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts. I know at this current moment, there is not a filter ability specifically for funding foreign funding opportunities. That is something that I know our Division of Communications and Outreach is actively working on, and we're very excited about that coming, to help with folks. And then there are also some ICs that have, you know, curated lists about foreign investigators. I think NIAID has one. I was previously a grants management specialist at Fogarty. So, they also have a foreign funding newsletter specifically for global health researchers, both in terms of collaborations and things of that nature. So, you know, you could definitely look at those opportunities to help curate that. But we also have that great enhancement that's coming to our search page.

Cynthia Dwyer: Wonderful. Well, thank you, Emily. Thank you. Kasima. And so, I think you gave us a wealth of information there. I just have one more question that we're going to have time for right now on the same topic. We talked about institutions being foreign, but what options are there for international students and fellows and postdocs? So, I'm going to send this one to, to Mike.

Michael Sesma: Okay. We get that question a lot. And I think one of the things that are to remember is that if you're interested in a fellowship or a career development award, you have to be a US citizen or a permanent resident, in other words, a green card holder. If you don't have that status, then you're not able to you're not eligible for those mechanisms with one exception. And that is the Pathway to Independence award, which is the K99/R00. So, you may you're but again, you need to check the eligibility section of the NOFO to determine whether individuals who are not citizens or permanent residents are eligible to apply. And then you're also eligible to be supported on an research grant as a individual on the grant doing work on the grant. But that grant is awarded to your sponsor or your PI. So, the grantee, your PI, may consider appointing people who do not have the status of who might be on a visa, rather than being a permanent resident or a non-citizen.

Cynthia Dwyer: Okay. Wonderful. Thank you. So, we're going to stop the Round One of our Q&A with our panel. That went that went pretty fast for me. I'm not sure about you all out there, but, but it did for me, and so, but I want to get on to our interactive portion. When we return, we're going to be covering Q&A that you've submitted related to application forms, due dates, the review process and more. So, we definitely want to stay tuned for that. All right. So, are you ready? Let's see. We are going to play a game. Oh, don't want to go up. I already blew it. I already gave you the answer to the, first one. This is called Submission Policies: You Make the Call. So, we're going to give you several scenarios, about six, and you are going to make the decision - what's the correct answer in this particular scenario. So, our first scenario is, has to do with application due dates. You're planning to submit an R03 application for the June 16th standard due date, which falls on a Sunday this year. When is the latest you can submit your application and still be considered on time? Is it Friday, June 14th, the last business day before the due date? Is it Sunday, June 16th, Answer B, the due date that's listed in the funding opportunity? Or is it C, Monday, June 17th, which is the next business day. So, you make the call. We're going to give you a few seconds. We've got about a quarter of you have answered so far. So, let's see what, what the response is. Right now, it's okay, it's right now, Monday, June 17th the next business day is looking pretty good. So, we're going to stop the results and share those.

All right. If you said Monday, June 17th, either you knew the right answer or you saw it when I gave you a sneak peek of the of what to put on your answer box. Sheri, can you tell us a little more about the answer to this one?

Sheri Cummins: Sure. The correct answer is Monday, June 17th, the next business day. And just a reminder that applications are due at 5:00 PM local time of the submitting institution or organization. So, our standard policy is if an application due date falls on a weekend, a federal holiday, or when the Washington, DC area federal offices are closed, for example, for a snow event or for something of that nature. Then the due date falls to the next business day. And so, if you take into another example would be May 25, May 25 this year, falls on a Saturday. And so, it would go to the next business day, right? Which is May 27th. May 27th is a holiday. So, then it again goes to the next business day, May 28th. So, it kind of works that way. But I did put on here a better answer. Submit early and enjoy your weekend or holiday because really you shouldn't be waiting till the last minute anyway.

Cynthia Dwyer: All right. Very sound advice. Okay, let's go ahead and go to our second question, which is late applications. You have a personal emergency which will impact on time submission of an application. Will NIH accept a late application? A is yes, B is no, C is maybe.

Right now, the leading answer is no. With a maybe not too far away. And yes, there's just a very small group of you that said yes. So, we'll see what the final result is in just a moment. We'll give it about five more seconds.

All right, let's go ahead and end it.

And let's see what the answer is.

Sheri Cummins: Maybe.

Cynthia Dwyer: Go ahead Sheri. Share why?

Sheri Cummins: So, if you're working with NIH and I just wanted to stop here for a second and just say you need to get really comfortable with hearing the phrase, it depends. Or maybe, because things are very nuanced. A lot of our policies and processes and all apply across all the institutes and centers. But there is some variation between them. There is variation in how our applications are that are coming in late, are going to be reviewed as well. Late applications are accepted in extenuating circumstances. So, it's not a given, and they're only accepted in extenuating circumstances that are happening to the PDPI's of the application. So, if you're an administrator and you're the only administrator for your organization, and you have a terrible car accident and you're not able to submit the applications or something, God forbid, you really should have a backup. But in that same scenario, if the PDPI was, was had a health emergency or something, was unable to finish that last aspect aspects of the submission with their administrative officials, then that would be something that we would take into consideration. When there is some extenuating circumstances, they need to be documented in a cover letter that is submitted as an attachment with your application. It is not assembled as part of the application, but it is actually brought in as part of the application. It's not seen by anybody but the staff and receipt and referral that need to see it is what I'm trying to say there. And there's no permission in advance. So, really, you've put all this effort into your application submission. If you're going to be late, document in the cover letter and it will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis by our center, our division of receipt and referral staff. And we have lots of examples of things that are typically accepted and things that aren't under our late applications page.

Cynthia Dwyer: Great. Thank you. Sheri. I'm sure the 61% of our viewers who said no are happy to hear that there is a maybe in that answer. All right, we're moving on. Dealing with system issues. So, you're having issues with a federal system which may impact your ability to submit on time. Will you be penalized if it causes a delay? A is yes, B is no, C is maybe. It's neck and neck right now in our poll. Let, we've got neck and neck with no or maybe. So, let's see where that's going to end up in just a few seconds.

Sheri Cummins: Why did you say comfortable with Maybe? But I'm not saying that's the answer.

Cynthia Dwyer: All right. Okay, we're going to do a countdown. Three. Two. One. Your last chance. All right, let's see what the results are.

The answer, Sheri.

Sheri Cummins: Is no, with a caveat, right. So, that kind of gets into the maybe territory there. So, it's no assuming that when you do run into an issue with one of these federal systems, that you notify your eRA service desk by the deadline that you can, that the service desk is able to confirm that the issue is beyond your control. Guess what's not beyond your control? Let's see. Following instructions or, getting your application together and submitting early, things like that. So, it needs to be something that is with our systems and on our side that the issue is there. The federal systems that we're kind of looking at are things like ASSIST that you use to prepare and submit your applications, or grants.gov used to prepare and submit applications, the grants.gov system itself that processes our applications, the system for award management, NIH eRA Commons, those types of things. But again, the most important thing is you call the service desk, you open a ticket, and you document your good faith effort to submit. And as long as we can confirm that's beyond your control, and you work with us to complete the submission. Now, if the service desk tells you how to how to complete that submission, and you wait for three weeks to do the submission that's on you. You have to be timely in how you respond with us. But we try, you know, to guard against you being penalized for things that are our fault.

Cynthia Dwyer: Right. All right, let's move on. I love the emojis. This is, great.

Sheri Cummins: I do too.

Cynthia Dwyer: It's like the reactions. All right. So now we're going to talk about application submissions. Your first application wasn't funded. After speaking with your program officer, you're confident that you can respond to the reviewer feedback and create a strong resubmission application. How many resubmission applications does NIH allow? A is one, B is two, and C is three.

All right, let's see. All right. Right now, we have the answer of one is in the lead, followed by two, followed by three.

All right, let's see what. Let's give them about five seconds to make that final You Make the Call decision. All right. And let's see what our answer is. All right Sheri.

Sheri Cummins: One. So, let's talk for a minute about what a resubmission is. So, resubmission is an unfunded application that has been modified following the initial review and resubmitted for consideration. So, you submitted an application, it was a new application when you submitted it. It wasn't funded unfortunately, but you want to be able to respond to that reviewer feedback and in fact tell the tell the reviewers for the next time what you did to respond to it. So, you actually get a one-page introduction to talk about all the changes you made to your proposal since the previous review. And you get one chance really to kind of do that, to say, I need this do over with incorporating that feedback, okay? That submission, that resubmission has to be done within 37 months of that initial application coming in. Now, you don't have to do a resubmission application. You can just change your application any way you seem see fit to make it stronger. Perhaps incorporating the reviewer feedback in that's kind of your call. I would suggest doing that because that's what the feedback was for. But you can actually come back in as a new application so you can submit an application as new and then try again as new, but you don't get the ability to talk about how you fixed it. If you come in as a new application, right. You can't talk about the review in any, any way if you come in as a new application, not even in a cover letter, do you want to talk about it? But that is kind of our policy. You get that kind of one do over with very explicit information about how you've responded to the review.

Cynthia Dwyer: Okay. Wonderful. Thank you. Sheri. Okay, so let's go to our next one. Only two more questions remain. Overlapping applications. So, you're a real go getter, and I can already tell that our audience are this way. But you've found several funding opportunities with similar due dates that you think are a good fit for your application. To increase your chances of success, you decide to submit the same application to all of them. Is this a good idea or is this a bad idea? You make the call. All right. We're going to give them about five seconds for this one. So, make a quick decision. Is it A good or B bad. I love the reactions. Okay, let's go ahead and show the answer. If you said it was a bad idea, are you right?

Sheri Cummins: It's a bad idea, with few exceptions. We don't allow multiple applications that have duplicate or highly overlapping information in them under review at the same time, and not only just under review at the same time, at NIH, at any of the public health service agencies. So, that includes NIH, Agency for Healthcare Research Quality (AHRQ), FDA, CDC. Okay. And what we mean by under review means it was submitted for review and you, it's under review until you get your summary statement back. Right. So, that was that was the documentation of the review. Is that summary statement coming back. And CSR has a great page there called the CSR Evaluation of Unallowable Resubmission and Overlapping Applications page that talks about this in detail and what is and isn't allowed.

Cynthia Dwyer: All right. Thank you. We are moving on to our last question. And with the weather that many of us have been experiencing across the at least the United States recently, this is, a very appropriate, question, but your Office of Sponsored Projects was ready to submit multiple applications for an R01 standard due date when the institution was impacted by a severe weather event and was forced to close. What should you do? A, you do your best to meet the deadline by submitting from home. B, you submit the applications on the next available due date. C, call NIH and beg for an extension or D, submit the applications with cover letters explaining the delay when your institution reopens. So, we see a few for A, B, and C, the majority are responding about, that you should submit the application with a cover letter, but we are getting quite a few that you do your best to meet the deadline. So, we'll give it about three seconds, so that we can get on to all our other Q&A. And let's go. Let's see what happens. What do you do? It's actually....

Sheri Cummins: It's actually D.

Cynthia Dwyer: It's not B it's.

Sheri Cummins: That's my bad B for my bad. It's D.

Sheri Cummins: Submit the applications with cover letters explaining the delay when your institution reopens. So, that part here that you see in red. Our primary concern is for the health and safety of the people and animals in the programs we oversee. You know, getting that application in is not as important as your well-being and your health and safety. So, really that foremost is take care of yourself first. When your institution does reopen, then you're going to want to get those applications in. And you have basically up until the amount of days your institution was closed, your organization was closed to get it in. So, if you were closed for two days, you've got kind of two days to get that in. And that's kind of an automatic extension. Now, we'll often put out if there's a major, event that's impacting a large number of institutions or organizations, we'll put out an NIH guide notice with some reminders about, you know, the flexibilities that we have in place and so forth. But even if we don't put out that that reminder notice, know that you do have, up to the number of days your institution was closed to get that in. And we do have a page again on this on the Grants.nih.gov website, for the extramural response to national disasters and other emergencies.

Cynthia Dwyer: Okay, great. Well thank you. Well, thank you, everybody, for playing our game, with us. And hopefully you did well. But, either way, hopefully you learned a little bit along the way about our submission policies. So, what's next? Now we're going to move on to our NIH expert Q&A panel Round Two. That's going to be followed by our lightning round, with our NIH experts as well, before we wrap up today. So, I can't already this it's, seems to be going by so quickly. So, we'll get rid of the slide, and we'll get our panel up. And I'm going to give this first question. We're going to move right on to due dates. So, this this question on due dates is going to go to Brittany. Can you explain how NIH application review and award cycles work? Actually, I think we do have, I think we have a slide that can help with this. We'll see if, our technical guru can pop that slide up for us.

Brittany Mason-Mah: Yes. And while that's coming on, I can explain. We appreciate that. It's a little confusing. So, because we have a two-stage review process, the study section generally is the common term people use for the review meeting, in which your application will be reviewed by a group of peer scientists who understand that science. And the second stage of review is what's called council review. That's where the ICs make these funding recommendations, thinking about their mission and availability of funds and all those kinds of things. So, when we are talking about the dates, they're a little bit off. So, if you are looking for a particular cycle, so say we look here at cycle one your application is due within these due dates. It's going to be reviewed about two months or so from when you submit it. So, that would be reviewed in June or July. But then the advisory council is after that. So, the advisory council generally for a lot of say R01 level applications are reviewed in October. So, you may see the council round reflected in some of your documentation for an October council review. But the meeting in which they're actually discussing your application is happening at those scientific merit review meetings in about June or July. So, that's a helpful way to think about when you're feeling like things don't quite line up. Remember that there's two steps of that review process.

Cynthia Dwyer: Great. Thank you. All right. So, we're done with the slides now. And I'm going to take the next question. I'm going to send this to Michelle Timmerman. In the video we learned that when an application is submitted, it's sent to the Center for Scientific Review, specifically to the Division of Receipt and Referral. And one of the questions that we received from our attendees was, could you please explain how that application is actually assigned to an institute or center for potential funding?

Michelle Timmerman: Okay. Third time's a charm. Can you hear me now?

Cynthia Dwyer: We can hear you.

Michelle Timmerman: Great. Be prepared to hear me say that a lot today. Yeah. So, each IC participates in a variety of different NOFOs, and they each support a different range of topics. And the institutes and centers have negotiated among themselves who is going to support topics that are relevant to multiple institutes and centers. For example, is lung cancer supported by the National Cancer Institute or by the National Heart, Lung and Blood Institute. So, those are the types of things that they've decided. They communicate that to DRR through a list of topics that we call referral guidelines. And once your application is submitted, doctoral level scientist in DRR, like myself, consider the science proposed in the application. Any suggestions and rationale you may have submitted on the assignment request form and those referral guidelines. Now, a critical detail is that we can only assign an institute or center participating in the NOFO. So, that's why it's important to discuss your research with the program officer as you develop your application.

Cynthia Dwyer: Okay. That's great. Thank you very much. Michelle. I'm going to just stick with you for our next question as well. And that is, could you please explain the difference between the terminology because it can get confusing sometimes. The difference between a Scientific Review Group, which is also referred to as an SRG, a panel and a study section.

Michelle Timmerman: Yeah. And they're all equivalent. And you might see a variety of other acronyms for individual groups, some of which don't even spell out anything. And sometimes the study section is preexisting. And you'll be able to see on either CSRs or the Institute's website what topics they cover and the standing reviewers. Other times, all of the reviewers are recruited for the meeting. We call those the Special Emphasis Panels, or the acronym is SEPs.

Cynthia Dwyer: Okay. Great. And is there any way, to suggest a specific study section?

Michelle Timmerman: Yes, we created a form for that. It is the PHS assignment request form. All of it is optional. But the most important part of it, in my opinion, is the open text box where you're able to explain your rationale. So, part of that is going to be your scientific rationale for why your application aligned with a particular study section, or also a particular institute and center. But also, if you spoke to specific staff, like if you spoke to a program officer, you can list that in that open text box for the rationale.

Cynthia Dwyer: Okay. Wonderful. All right. Well, we're going to we've we're running out of time. So, let's move on to peer review. Thank you. Michelle. Brittany, we touched on the impact score earlier during the video in response to some of the inquiries that we've been getting. Can you share a brief, and I know it's going to be hard to do this, but a high-level overview of the scoring process during the review process?

Brittany Mason-Mah: Absolutely. So, when we're doing the scientific review, so the scientific and technical merit of individual applications, we advise our reviewers to use a one through nine scoring system. So, a one is indicating an application that's likely to have a high impact. So, a one is a better and nine is getting to your lower impact. Perhaps there's significant challenges in that proposal that would potentially have a lower impact on its field of science. So, we give those applications out to individual reviewers who provide preliminary scores. And then we look at those scores to determine, who is going to be discussed at the meeting. So, that's a big misconception. Somehow is an impact score is given to those applications that are discussed at the meeting. And then there's a set of applications that are considered not discussed. So, they get a full review. They're still seen by scientists. You're still going to get a summary statement. But if you're looking at that impact score that's defined by the discussion of the full panel at the review meeting, who defines that final overall impact score. So, a one through nine gets mathematically transformed to be a number out of 100. But ultimately, they come from the one through nine scale.

Cynthia Dwyer: Okay. Oh, great. That was a wonderful overview in a very short amount of time. So, thank you. And obviously we're we are putting some links into the chat to help you I understand that we do have, still having some technical difficulties with you, our attendees being able to cut and paste those. Do not worry. We are going to share all of these links with you and post them on our Grant's events page. We'll let you know that will be within the next 7 to 10 days when we post the video and everything else. But we will make sure that you get the resources that we have been discussing today. So, let's just do one more question and we'll see, Mike, if how quickly you can also answer this. It has to do with peer review as well. But how are proposals recommended for funding once the peer reviews are complete? And do they need a certain overall impact score to be funded? If you could explain that that would be great.

Michael Sesma: So, you know, the impact score tells us about the scientific and technical merit, the significance of a of a particular proposal. And I would tell you that that's not the only consideration when we make a decision about recommending a grant for funding, we look at the how does this particular application, the aims and this application align with the highest priorities of the institute and our strategy going forward in terms of research, our research mission. We look at the stage of the investigator. I already told you that we consider ESI investigators differently than established investigators. So, some institutes do publish a pay line for which there's a high probability of funding, up to a certain score, or percentile rank. And below that, there's a range where we call there's a range. The next range we call a gray zone where it's hard to tell whether it's going to tip towards a high probability of funding or a lower probability funding. So, those are kind of how we make those decisions. But the most important thing, and this is why understanding what your program officer does and what their responsibility is, is that we, a program officer, are responsible for the grants and applications in our portfolio. So, we have to make recommendations to our institute director, to the leadership in the Institute about which applications address the high priorities of the Institute, which ones are potentially highest impact in terms of moving the field forward, in which you're proposing your research and the state, the career stage of the particular investigator and, what that project addresses. How does it fit within our portfolio? Is this going to be one of 50 grants in the portfolio, or is this going to be just like one of ten that are already in that portfolio? So, we want to identify research niches that are understudied or of high potential, but maybe a little bit risky. So, it's not just one thing and it's not just dependent on the score. It's important that you talk to a program officer at a particular institute to find out how that institute makes those decisions.

Cynthia Dwyer: Wonderful. Thank you. Mike. So, I'm going to, we have so many questions and so little time left. I'm going to send this to Emily. Emily, some of our institutions are large enough that they have administrators, different administrators working on pre award, versus post award issues. But then we have other institutions that one person is doing both. We've received some inquiries about what are some of the activities for pre award and what are some for post award that they would be working with a grants management specialist or officer with.

Emily Linde: Great question, Cynthia. So, pre-award, I think that what I would advise administrators to do is if they have questions of a financial nature or eligibility to please reach out to the grants management contact listed on the NOFO. I think that's the way that we most often help people prior to award, especially if they're like, have questions about is this an allowable cost? Can I put this in the application? I don't understand how to I don't understand indirect costs. What can I ask for indirect costs or what can I ask for indirect costs under this program? Those are the sorts of things you would address Pre-award. Post-award you're going to have more questions potentially. You might have questions about the submission of the research performance progress report or any of the other reporting requirements, including, inventions or financial reporting. And then also and I think most importantly is to remember that the grants management specialist is your number one contact for prior approval requests. That's where the official requests really need to be submitted. And if there's additional information that's needed and if we need to loop in others, we will do so. So, that would be my quick summary of how to interact both pre and post award with your grants management specialists.

Cynthia Dwyer: That's great. Thank you. And I'm going to throw this one to either Kasima or you Emily. It has to do with policy information and the best place to go if you're wanting, we got this, many people ask this. Where do I go for both the current policies as well as updates? Who do I talk to? So, I'm throwing it out there and would love for one of you to answer this for us.

Kasima Garst: Sure, I can start off with that, Cynthia. The main thing to highlight is that the NIH Grants Policy Statement, which is on our grants and funding web page, is the primary source document for NIH grants policy. We also have a curated page that highlights any notices of policy change. and that is also part of our NIH Guide Table of Contents newsletter that is available, that you can subscribe to as well. That's really where you're going to find that basic information that's going to apply to all the awards. And then I think we're, Emily can add in a little bit of extra context too, is there may be some additional information within the notice of award that you'll want to, be directed at as well. So, Emily, if you'd like to, to add on to that.

Emily Linde: Certainly, I would look at the notice of award. You may also want to reach out to your IC. The IC may have specific guidelines that you need to follow. So, and then the other place that I would recommend, especially if you're working with multiple organizations and not just NIH as a funding agency, is 2 CFR 200 for the governing principles.

Cynthia Dwyer: All right. Great. Okay. So, we have five minutes left. We have to do our speed round. I'm but before that, I just wanted for if Sheri, you could answer a question and then Brittany, if you could answer a question in 30 seconds, then we'll go to our speed round and then we'll wrap it up. So, Sheri, we talked about notices and funding opportunities in the NIH guide. What is your advice to be able to stay on top of the changes.

Sheri Cummins: So, we're posting literally everyday things into the NIH guide for grants and contracts. And as Kasima alluded to at the top of the NIH guide for Grants and Contracts, there is a link to subscribe to a weekly email that will give you basically a table of contents and links to all of the things that were posted for that week. So, you can just kind of scan through that and see if there's something of interest and go check it out. Also, we've announced in the NIH guide just recently a whole bunch of initiatives that are going to be effective for the January 25, 2025, due dates and beyond. And we have a new, page set up on our Grants.nih.gov website. And it's actually if you just go to Grants.nih.gov, there's right in the picture window at the top, you'll see a advertisement to get to the page. But that talks about all of the things that are going to be coming up, and we'll be continuing to update those pages as our plans evolve. So, that's a good place to kind of keep tabs on things as well.

Cynthia Dwyer: Great. All right. Brittany, 30 seconds. Can you recommend any other resources in addition to the guide for our attendees?

Brittany Mason-Mah: Absolutely. And I will say all of us. So, we've talked a lot about acronyms and systems and things, but NIH is staffed by people, people who are invested in you and your work and navigating this very large and complicated system. So, please don't hesitate to reach out. If we can't answer your question, as Michael said, we I'm sure we can find someone who can. And we are quite happy to get you to the right place and answer your questions, to facilitate you on this journey.

Cynthia Dwyer: Awesome. Well, thank you so much. Well, let's move on to our lightning round. And this really is going to be lightning round. In 15 seconds or less I'm going to call out each of our panelists and I would like you to share your, share your advice. So, we've got Dr. Michael Sesma. You're up.

Michael Sesma: Okay. So, what do you think is the most important thing to do if you want a grant from NIH? You know, we've given you lots of advice, guidance and resources and explained the grant process, at least generally. You've done your homework, you've talked to your program officer, you've talked to your mentor, your PI. None of this matters if you don't submit that application. So, if you want a grant, you got to take the shot, submit the application. We're here to help you. That's it.

Cynthia Dwyer: Awesome. Thank you. All right. Emily Lindy.

Emily Linde: I'd like to just put in another plug for the NIH grant, guide for Grants and Contracts. And there's two reasons. One is it has all of the funding opportunity announcements. It explains the science. But the other thing, from the administrator's point of view, is that covers all of those policy changes that are that that are coming up. And it's super critical to be sure that you are aware and prepared for any of those changes.

Cynthia Dwyer: Wonderful. All right. Dr. Brittany Mason-Mah.

Brittany Mason-Mah: Sure. So, I would say read the review criteria. We know that NOFOs are big and scary and long, but at the very bottom in section five are the specific questions we tell reviewers to think about and evaluate such that they can inform program. Know what those questions are. It can help you shape your thoughts when you're putting together your application.

Cynthia Dwyer: Excellent. Dr. Michelle Timmerman.

Michelle Timmerman: Submit early, measure time on a calendar, not a clock, and be sure your intended institute or center participates in the funding opportunity.

Cynthia Dwyer: Awesome. All right, Kasima Garst, let's wrap it up.

Kasima Garst: And just to piggyback on what everybody else has said, subscribe to our many resources and newsletters and continue to take advantage of the training and webinar opportunities that are amazing, Division of Communications and Outreach helps hold. We are very dedicated to try and get all this information out to you, and we love engaging with you. So, so take advantage of these opportunities.

Cynthia Dwyer: Absolutely. Well, we hope that you, I do have a slide if we could get that up. We hope that you'll stay connected. This this slide shows you the number of social media outlets, newsletters, blogs, X, podcasts that are available to you in addition to our websites and our staff. And we are here for you. We want to help you be a success and succeed in, in, the application process. So, we want to thank you, everyone for joining us from around the world. We hope we answered some of your questions. We appreciate all that you're doing. to help support the research enterprise for a healthier tomorrow. So, on behalf of the NIH Center for Scientific Review and the Office of Extramural Research and our 27 Institute and center staff, we wish you all the best. And thanks again for joining us today.