**TRANSCRIPT**

**Fall 2024 OER and NIH Update**

**September 12, 2024**

Dr. Nonye Harvey: Well, good afternoon, everyone. Welcome to the Fall 2024 OER All-Hands. It's good to see a lot of people at this meeting. It's a virtual one, and I do hope that you guys are having a lovely day so far and did have a relaxing summer and looking forward to Fall. I felt like last week felt like more like Fall than it did today, so either way, it's my favorite time of the year, so I'm looking forward to the season. But by way of introductions, I'm Nonye Harvey, and I'm with the Data Sharing and Policies Implementation team and the OD, and I'm a member of the OER Employee Engagement Committee. And co-hosting with me today is my colleague, Aesha Brandy. She is one of the co-chairs of EEC, so the Employee Engagement Committee. She co-chairs along with Cynthia Dwyer. And on behalf of the committee, I would like to say thank you all for joining us with this all-hands, and we welcome you all to this meeting. As we wait for folks to join, you may have seen a question in the chat that asks about exciting things are fun things you did this Summer. I'm sure we all had a busy, fun, exciting, adventurous Summer. It would be nice to kind of engage with the team, with the group on that. So, feel free to use the chat to enter your responses. And for those on the phone, we'll try to read a few of those highlights at some point before we go into our presentation. Okay, so while you're doing that, just a few housekeeping announcements. Please do mute your mics, and for questions, if you have any questions during the Q and A, please use the Q and A box. Sorry, questions during the presentation, use the Q and A box and chat for just any general comments. But, chat, just primarily use that for your responses to the icebreaker question. We will take questions at the end, so after the presentation. You're more than welcome to turn your cameras on so it's not just me, Liza, Aesha and Mike on my call on video. And for those that are interested or need it, you can enable the closed captioning by going to the bottom of your screen, and there should be a button on there. You can click on that to enable it or click on it to disable. So I think those are the few housekeeping announcements. Let's see here. Aesha, do you want to share what's already coming in the chat?

Aesha Brandy: Yes.

Dr. Nonye Harvey: Almost 300 people here, that's awesome.

Aesha Brandy: We have a lot of exciting things that we did over the Summer. Let's see. Looks like Dr. Lauer spent with grandkid. Philly day trips, some gardening, which is always awesome. Delaware beaches. Megan got a new hip: Awesome. We have folks who moved into their new home. This is awesome, awesome, awesome.

Dr. Nonye Harvey: That's great. Great, fun, exciting, and I'm sure folks went to really interesting places, too, travel-wise. So, I appreciate you all sharing that with the group. Okay, so just a quick overview of what you can expect at the next ... this hour that we have together, there will be a joint presentation by our OER leadership, so that would be Dr. Mike Lauer. He is the Director of OER and the NIH Deputy Director for Extramural Research, as well as Dr. Liza Bundesen, who is the Deputy Director for OER. So, for those that are new to OER, welcome, and this is the opportunity to meet our ... the leadership. And so, they are going to share some updates on the OER front and NIH front. They want to share some highlights from this fiscal year from OER, and one of those highlights is really the OER federal staff forum that we had and hosted a few months ago. So, you'll have the opportunity to hear about what ... the feedback staff provided and some ideas to continue to make OER the best place to be. And looking into FY '25, that's coming up quickly in about a couple of weeks. They will share some of the priorities for FY '25, 2025. And finally, we'll cap the hour with a few updates from the Employee Engagement Committee and Aesha. My co-hosts will be providing that. So I'm hoping that this would be an exciting opportunity for us to hear and listen from our leadership and updates that there are. So let me hand this over to Liza and Mike.

Dr. Michael Lauer: Great. Thank you so much. Can we pull up the slides? Oh, they're here. Got it. Okay. All right. So, I want to welcome you to this all-hands meeting. Thank you so much for joining us. Before I get started, OER is the best. And I really had the opportunity to feel that during the last couple of weeks of August. And I want to thank many of you, the many of you who sent best wishes. I was very touched. And I feel very honored and privileged and blessed to be able to work with you all and work in OER. This is our strategic management and budget report. We put it out every year. There's a ton of stuff in there. We post it on the Internet. Please take a look, a lot to be proud of. Okay, so I'm going to start with just a brief overview of what our budget looks like. This is actually already out of date because yesterday we found out that we're going to be getting some additional monies. But what this shows is the overall budget for OER, which is increased from about $130 million, $140 million back in FY '20 to maybe around $175 million in FY '24. We did take a bit of a hit going from FY '23 to FY '24. We anticipated that that was going to happen, but we actually got a little bit more money yesterday to help support some of our IT work, so this slide is already a little out-of-date. Now, this is the OER data on our federal employees. And we have seen a period of tremendous growth. Back in FY '18, we were down to 184. You may remember at that time we were on the tail end of a long hiring freeze. At the end of FY '23, where you were at 277, and then in FY '24 at this point in time, we're up to 354. Now, part of this is because we have engaged on a campaign to convert a large number of contractor positions to FDE positions, recognizing the long-term needs and the nature of governmental work. This has also helped us save a substantial amount of money that we can use for other purposes. So OER is growing, is continuing to grow. What may happen next year, it's unclear. If we have a hiring freeze next year, then this may change. And there's been a tremendous amount going on, and this is just a small listing simplifying peer review, the fellowship applications, the common disclosure forms, the working group on postdoc training and the various changes that have gone there, foreign small-business security management, the implementation ongoing of the NIH data management sharing policy, the fantastic work that has been going on with the Unite. We actually heard a little bit about that at IC directors' meeting this morning, the implementation of the data management sharing policy and novel alternative methods. So, these are some of the high-priority items of NIH, and obviously we in OER are in the center of many of them. One of our core functions is to enhance research integrity. Research integrity allegations have grown dramatically in recent years for a variety of reasons. These show data through, I think it was early May 2024, so we're on track this year to get around 600 new allegations, which is just a huge amount and is much, much greater than were, say, 8 or 9 years ago when we’re running about 100 allegations a year. Another area that's taking up a tremendous amount of our time is audits. This also came up in IC directors' meeting today. So OER at any given time is involved in 40, 50, 60 audits, and this just shows what our numbers have been. These audits are extremely time consuming. We've had some. We've had quite a few major successes, and I'm just picking out one here. This has to do with the issue of grant closeout. I have to say, when I first came to OER I thought grant closeout was very simple. You close it out. But it turns out to be a lot more complicated, and a few years ago this actually went all the way to the level of the Deputy Secretary of DHHS. Thanks to some incredible work, the ... We're now at a point where we are actually the lead agency for DHHS in closing out grants. This is still a work in progress. We're trying to make this process more automated and streamlined, but this is, I think, something that we should feel quite proud of. ERA, which of course is the core enterprise system that supports grants at NIH and in fact supports more than half of all grants in the US government, is continuing its amazing work, and the numbers are just stunning. We published a 1,700 NOFOs, 170,000 applications and awards, $44 billion in award applications, 329,000 users, 31 million log-ins, 59,000 reviewers at over 3,200 meetings and the generation of 7.9 million documents, just 1 year's worth of work, which is just absolutely stunning when you think about it. We also are engaged in an extensive amount of outreach, and we have had ... We've moved our regional seminars to public webinars. These have drawn nearly 57,000 live, attendees, 70,000 post-event recording views. The degree of outreach is something like we've never seen before. Our extramural staff training program continues to be exceedingly active. And then we put out newsletters and blogs, which go out to more than 350,000 people. You'll see here that the blog last year that got the most number of views was Simplified Review Framework. I think anytime you talk about peer review, people get very excited. A lot of activity going on the Congressional front. We have been subject to numerous Congressional inquiries. We have made a number of briefings, some of them in person, some of them quite lengthy. I gave a transcribed interview that lasted for a good chunk of the day back in November. The audits, as I mentioned, continue. Many of these audits are Congressional requests. We know that there's going to be a new administration coming in January '25, and a new administration means new ideas, and those new ideas will mean opportunities for us to get involved and do some more work. And then of course our Director, Dr. Bertagnolli, has articulated and initiated some of her key priorities including enhancing our data ecosystem and establishing a network for primary clinical care research. Okay, so I will stop here, and, Liza, I'm going to turn this over to you.

Dr. Liza Bundesen: Great. Thanks, Mike, and hi, everybody. It's great to see so many people online today. So next, we'll go over the feedback gathered from the 2024 Federal Staff Forum, which was organized by the EEC a few months ago. The purpose was to provide OER staff an open forum for discussion about how to make OER an even better place to work. The EEC has held four of these over the years, the first being in 2020 and the most recent one being a few months ago. Obviously one of our EEC members could have easily presented these slides, but Mike and I wanted to go through them with you to make it clear that we've heard your thoughts. What's so helpful about the forum is that it gives staff the opportunity to provide us with very specific ideas. While we have the FEVS, it's framed fairly broadly, and sometimes it can be hard to interpret what's behind some of the ratings and how to address them, so the forum is really helpful for giving us specific feedback. Now, here are some examples of outcomes from prior staff forums. We have the OER Connector Newsletter, which you can see here on the right. There are the weekly small staff summaries and all-hands communications. There's the OER New Employee Welcome. We've made improvements to our OER websites, including our staff intranet that includes more information about how we are organized and opportunities for training. We also have the fun employee activities like the exercise challenges and the trivia activities, which I get a huge kick out of, personally. Okay, so for this most recent forum, the EEC surveyed the federal staff before the forums to select discussion topics. The two that were selected were work environment and career development. There were over 120 participants and 10 breakout rooms with moderators and note takers, so this was just amazing. It involved a lot of people and a lot of coordination. So, what EEC did was to pose discussion questions for each topic and then asked, what is OER doing well, and how can we improve? So, some examples of these framing questions were, "How does your work environment impact your ability to get your work done? In what other ways does your work environment benefit you and your work? What are some challenges to achieving a productive or positive work environment?" and so on. And then for career development, "How does OER support your career development? What kinds of resources are most helpful? What are the challenges to achieving your goals? How can you and other OER employees contribute to advancing your careers and so on?" So first, we'll go through work environments and what OER is doing well and then some opportunities for improvement. So, we heard from staff that workplace flexibilities and remote work are well executed and maximize benefits, that workplace and scheduling flexibilities allow employees to work on a schedule that works for their lives. For those who are engaging in remote work, it's offering autonomy and empowerment that there's an increased talent pool for recruiting new staff. Some are experiencing fewer sick days, fewer distractions from folks just popping in. And then this is a big one for many of us: less time, stress, and expense without commuting. I commute 45m 50 minutes each way. And then when you have that found time, you have an increased ability to do other things like exercise. For the folks who are coming in the office, they enjoy interactions with colleagues, a change of scenery. Some of us like a division between work and home. And then when you're on-site, you can take advantage of facilities like on-site gym, the food trucks, stuff like that. Staff also feel that they have the support and tools to get their job done. For example, the technology is available to them, and our IT staff are responsive and pleasant to work with, that our various communications platforms like Microsoft Teams and Zoom are working well. We're all now experts at that, whereas I remember the first Webex meeting that I hosted, I was sweating buckets because I didn't know what I was doing. Supplies are available for those who need them. And then some more positive feedback that staff appreciate the open communication with OER offices and from leadership, we hear that you're enjoying the small staff summaries, the good-morning-OER communications and the all-hands meetings and that staff feel motivated, productive, and supported. "We do a lot of meaningful work" is one quote, that we're getting more done with less staff, that the environment minimizes microaggressions, that people within their immediate groups are helpful and assist each other, that they appreciate their supportive leadership and acknowledgment, and folks always appreciate awards and shout-outs, various kinds of recognition for the hard work that you're doing. So now, some opportunities for improvement, so we could support team building and staff contributions to a positive work environment. Some suggestions included employee awards for contributing to the respectful workplace, supporting OER team cohesiveness, providing opportunities to connect with colleagues, more regular and interactive all hands meetings, in-person, and virtual opportunities to connect, and you'll hear more from the EEC later today about some upcoming activities to do that and encouraging work beyond your immediate group. Another suggestion was optimizing communication and tools for the hybrid work environment. So, this could include streamlining digital communications and encouraging ways to improve online communication. While we have all these platforms available to us like Teams and Zoom and SharePoint and shared drives and intranets, sometimes it can be a little dizzying to kind of orient yourself with what you're using and who's using what, and different teams are using different combinations, so that was one idea, to simplify our usage of some of these tools. And then to update and advertise the database of subject matter experts. This is on our OER staff intranet page under the About OER section, and it includes a list of all of our staff and the subject matter experts, and who do you go to if you have a question about X, Y or Z? And that is due for a refresh, so that's a good suggestion. Some other opportunities to improve, so consider solutions for heavy workloads, increased staffing to maintain responsiveness and ease workload, and help staff manage competing priorities. This is a big one. There's concern that many individuals are setting priorities both within and outside of OER and that staff may need to help prioritize and rebalance work or even say no. So, we're heading into an election season. Some people call this silly season. So, we've got presidential elections, Congressional elections, and as a result of this, everyone is in a big rush. They want to make their mark, so they want to accomplish things. And so, what we see at this time is a proliferation of White House executive orders and memos and laws or bills being pushed through and to potentially become law. And sometimes when these initiatives come down, they are given to OER to implement. But then other times, another OD office or an IC may be tasked with implementing. And so what Mike and I have been doing in these situations is, if another office, for example, is implementing an initiative and has this mandate and has lots of great ideas, we work with them to level set and make sure that we can meet the spirit of whatever the initiative is but not go crazy, essentially, that we have to manage our workloads and our staff time. And so, we're very open also to working ... for staff to work with their supervisors and for their supervisors to work with us to prioritize work and to rebalance when necessary. Another opportunity is to maximize efficiency and effectiveness of meetings and e-mail communication. We're all in multiple back-to-back meetings all day with limited breaks, so one suggestion was to train meeting facilitators to have better structure and efficiency of these meetings, to cancel meetings when there's nothing to discuss or handle through e-mail or send fewer and more targeted emails. So, one thing I was thinking about was maybe we could have a lunch box event where we have organizational experts come and talk to us about ways to simplify our communication. But I had a colleague send me something this week with BLUF in the top of the e-mail, and I had to Google it. So, stands for Bottom Line Up Front, where he just put his request of me at the very top and in bold and then included some background information later on if I wanted to read it, which, I did not. So, I thought that was an interesting way to frame an e-mail. Okay, now on to career development, so what are we doing well? So, staff recognize that we have a lot of available training opportunities such as the core curriculum, the ODEO offerings at the training center and that there are many ways that we communicate training opportunities. So, there are emails. There's a section of the OER staff intranet, the EEC newsletter. I think we also include some offerings in our small staff summaries. And then, what are some opportunities for improvement? So, we can provide support for achieving individual goals. This might be one-on-one focused discussions on career goals and feedback, support for details with other organizations, ICs, agencies. Helping staff understand eligibility for training. Mentoring opportunities, either formal and informal. This could be within OER or outside of OER. I have a number of mentors, people from other ICS who mentor me. I'm, in turn, serving as a mentor as part of an NCI program right now for a staff member there. And also, to provide opportunities for staff to be presenters and be recognized as the lead on a project, I think this is a great option for career development. I've learned a lot myself when I've been put in these lead roles for projects, and you really make great connections with colleagues on work groups within OER and outside. Also, help staff navigate the abundance of information. We're constantly being bombarded with information and having to filter out, what's the main point? What's the most important thing for me? So, staff said that it was challenging to find what training is available in the training center, asked that we centralized information as much as possible, so perhaps there's an opportunity for us to beef up our training page on the staff intranet to provide new resources when needed like an SOP for onboarding. To disseminate more information about the student loan repayment program. To expand the IC job announcements for positions other than supervisors and Division Directors, this is the announcement e-mail that we send to extramural staff. And then also to utilize the WhatsApp OER e-mail to communicate training opportunities. Okay, and some last, additional suggestions to prioritize and support NIH and non-NIH trainings, for example, advertise free trainings at other agencies. Provide budget support for trainings. I know that this is a tough point for all of us during continuing resolutions or times when we have tighter budgets. And then prioritizing training in addition to workload, I've been working on this myself, that when I'm listening to a training that I'm present and I'm not checking my e-mail, because what's the point? And then support cross-training opportunities across OER and NIH, allowing staff to attend meetings on broader topics, support cross-training activities across divisions and offices, and encouraging and trusting staff to reach out to other offices. So, I think these are all excellent suggestions. And I would imagine our next steps would be for us to sit down with EEC and talk through these some more, and what are some action items that we can create in response to these very specific suggestions and then also discuss at our senior staff meetings? So, I want to thank the EEC committee for putting on this forum for all the moderators and note takers who also participated in our Technical Support. This was just really amazing, again, involved over 120 people that ... really huge and just such wonderful, constructive feedback and we're very, very grateful. So, with that, I will turn it back to you, Mike, to pick up on our OER priorities.

Dr. Michael Lauer: Great. Liza, thank you so much, and let me also ... I also want to echo what what Liza just said. These staff forums have been extraordinarily valuable for us over the past number of years and really want to thank you for participating, and I want to thank the EEC for all the incredible work that they have done in making it happen. All right. So FY25 is going to start out in a few weeks, and so the question is, what are going to be some of our priorities? So one, and this is to segue off of what Liza was just saying, is to support our staff and, one, appropriate streamline and triage work. And there are times when it's appropriate for us to say "No," and I am more than happy to be the skunk at the picnic, so to speak, when that's appropriate. We play a major role, of course, in implementing key NIH priorities, especially the priorities that are articulated by the NIH Director. We have to respond to Congress and to auditors. That's something that we have no choice on. And we need to do it well. We provide resources for the community. IT security always has to be first and foremost. I had talked about some of the amazing work that ERA is doing. ERA has set a fantastic example of incorporating security into the work culture. Supporting early-career investigators, this has been a major source of ... a major focus of interest for many years. We put out reports every 2 weeks as to how well the ICs are doing and supporting early-career investigators, and this is going to be especially important at a time when budgets are tight like this year and next year for sure. Compliance and integrity vigilance, the entire system depends upon the integrity of all its participants. And resilience in light of the new budgetary realities, we took a budget hit in FY '24. We're going to take another budget hit in FY '25. That's nobody's fault here. This is the reality of the environment that we're living in, and what we have to do is figure out how to best deal with it. And one thing that we have done, as I have mentioned, is a large number of contractor-to-FDE conversions, which helps us to handle these budget issues. This is very exciting. The grants.nih.gov site is going to be ... is being redesigned, and the new version is going to be launched in September of '24. It is absolutely fabulous. We've had a chance to play around with the development version. There's a website there on how you can explore it. It is ... I thought the previous site was great, and when Megan first mentioned that they were going to be updating it, what was going through my head is, well, what can you possibly do? But it's really amazing. In particular ... Well, I shouldn't say in particular. One item that's in there is a new look and feel to the NIH guide and how one can search for funding opportunities there. So, yeah, please take a look and provide feedback, and the information is available here. Okay. Another area that we have been dealing within the past few years and we will continue to deal with, unfortunately probably to an even greater degree next year, is supporting a safe and respectful workplace for NIH staff. We have had some very serious issues in which NIH staff as well as OER staff have been harassed and abused by people outside of NIH. And that's just not Okay. And of course, we also are dealing with issues where people are subject to harassment or other inappropriate conduct within NIH, and that's also not okay. So, we have developed mechanisms by which we can respond to these, and there have been a number of times where Liza and I have been personally involved in addressing some serious problems. So, any allegation of harassment or inappropriate conduct by non-NIH staff should be submitted to OER via the grantee harassment e-mail. And for situations that involve an NIH application or award, I personally will send a letter to the institution. I'm sending it to the Vice President for Research. In a number of cases, I personally will talk with them and point out that this is not okay, that it's certainly fine to disagree with the agency. Plenty of people do that. They do that on a regular basis. That's absolutely fine. What is not fine is to behave in an uncivil or abusive manner. And I will have to say that a number of times, institutional leadership has taken this seriously. And, as appropriate, we can take other actions like removing people from peer review. We can take actions on grants and involving the NIH Police, and we have done that. We have involved the NIH Police, and in fact, I have also spent some time talking with police at institutions when dealing with some potentially serious problems, Okay. Well, one area that, of course, has attracted a great deal of attention is generative artificial intelligence, or AI. And in fact, this may be a way in which we can address our workload and try to streamline our processes. One of the big questions is whether or not there is actually something to this or whether it's just a lot of hype. So, I read an interesting article, it was actually in an economics journal, a number of months ago about generative AI. It was very well-written, and it said we should be very careful not to overestimate what generative AI can do, but at the same time, we need to be very careful to not underestimate what generative AI can do. So very excited to say that we have a number of projects that are currently ongoing in which we are exploring ways in which we can use generative AI to help us with our work. So, for example, within IMOD, we have a project on responding to audits and Congressional requests and using generative AI to put together first-draft responses. We have a project in the guide to aid staff in identifying relevant policy information. We also ... Of course, we have a lot of meetings. Some of these meetings can be quite lengthy and involve a tremendous amount of substance, and we are exploring how we can use generative AI to generate high-quality summaries or maybe first drafts of summaries for these various meetings. Within ORRA, we have been using generative AI to translate code, for example, translating code from SAS to R. This is one strength of generative AI that is widely recognized also improving matching methods for large data sets. The RCDC group has been using this for meeting summaries and summarizing science. NLM has also done some really interesting work where they've used data from a reporter to answer questions and that they use generative AI to generate summaries. DCO has been bringing AI into their content development system. OPERA is exploring ways to use generative AI to respond to the very large number of inquiries that come in. And then DBRW, as you may know, we recently put out an RFI on the postdoc working group recommendations, and we're looking at potentially using generative AI to summarize RFI responses. This is all work in progress. I'm going to guess that some of these projects are going to be wildly successful and will potentially have transformative effects on how we do our work. And other of these projects will be disappointing, but that's okay. We can always learn something. Okay, so I'm stopping here. We were supposed to wrap this section up at 2:35, and I see we're at 2:36, so we're good.

Dr. Nonye Harvey: That is great. No worries at all. I think this was great. Thank you so much, Liza and Mike, for the updates and insights into kind of what to expect in FY 2025. But more importantly I think is recognizing and appreciating the amount of work that everyone has done and put in in this fiscal year. So, kudos to everyone and the team for all their efforts in FY '24, and I think we've got lots coming down the pipe with the new fiscal year, the election, the new administration and so on. So, I'm looking at the chat, and I thank you for those that have put in some links to resources that are helpful. One question that's come through and is ... Aside from having Dr. Lauer serve as the skunk at the picnic all the time, those of you old-timers know what that is. Do y'all have advice that OER could potentially apply or implement for us to respectfully push back on various requests coming in, so any approaches or insights on what staff might be able to do on their own?

Dr. Michael Lauer: So, a number of years ago, I went through a training, and it was Dr. Robert Kegan, I think was his name. He's a professor at Harvard, and his specialty is professionals, professional workers and what they do. So, he talked about this idea of what's called the big assumption. The big assumption is some assumption that we have that we may not even be aware of that is driving us to do things that may not necessarily be in our interest. So, one of the most common big assumptions is that you cannot say "No," because if you say "No," you will alienate people. So, if somebody asks you to do them a favor, there's a big assumption working that I have to answer yes to this because if I don't answer yes to this, then whoever is asking me to do the favor won't like me and won't want to talk to me anymore and will feel alienated by that. And so, one of the things that he did as part of his instruction was, he told us there have to be ways in which you can, first of all, try to identify what those big assumptions are, and then test it. Test the big assumptions, and you may very well find that they're wrong. You actually can say no. You should do it in a polite and civil way. Or let's say, for something like this within OER, it is perfectly fine to say, "Let me think about that, and I'll get back to you," which could be code language for, "I'm going to talk with my supervisor," or, "I'm going to bring this to the attention of OER leadership," and that's perfectly fine to do that. We've been asked over the years to undertake a number of big projects. The one that's sticking in my head right now is that were supposed to ... We were being asked to put together a website of all the clinical trial networks. I don't know why this popped in my head, but it does. It did. And we got some fantastic feedback from OER staff about why this was not going to work. And armed with that information, we were able to move on and politely turn that down. And I will tell you that the person whom I said no to is somebody whom we continue to have a very good working relationship. He was very understanding. So those are some thoughts.

Dr. Liza Bundesen: Yeah, and a few things that I've ... we've been doing recently is we have also very canned language for certain responses. So, we can recycle, recycle, recycle if we get similar requests. Sometimes we are ... We prepare responses for these audits that Mike was mentioning or these Congressional letters, and then we get a request to do another version of that. And so, we've said, "Well, I'm sorry. We don't have the bandwidth right now, but you may consider contacting the Office of Management Assessment because we just gave them a whole treasure trove of information. Or you may contact OPA because we gave them something similar." And then sometimes our colleagues in other offices will help us out because they do recognize what strain we're under. Or we defer. So, we've got a lot going on, and we do have a customer-service-oriented organization. As Mike was saying, we have this tendency to want to help and say "Yes," and that's wonderful, but it's also okay to defer. So, we had one IC approach us about creating a new website for resources for researchers with disabilities, and we believe that this is a very important thing to do, but it's not a house on fire, and we're happy to work with them in the future, maybe in a few months. So, we have a few strategies like that also.

Dr. Nonye Harvey: Thank you. Thank you, Mike, and Liza, for sharing those strategies and tools. And I think that it probably is okay if folks can also share what other strategies and tools that they've used and employed within their offices, as well. So, I think that will be very helpful. We do have another question that came in. Has there been any updates on transitioning to fully remote positions based on the HHS announcement earlier this year? And this is in light of the fact that it would help some folks as they're thinking about positions and their future career opportunities and skills based on geographic requirements and things like that. So, any thoughts or insights that you can share with us on that?

Dr. Liza Bundesen: I'm not 100-percent sure on that. Maybe our SMCO colleagues could type something into chat if they're aware. I know that certain positions have been ... They're looking at ... HHS has been looking at mission-critical positions for remote work and now other classes of positions. Oh. Okay. It looks like ... Did someone ... I'm seeing if OER would like to answer this question. So, I think that might be something that we need to clarify, but that's a really good question.

Dr. Nonye Harvey: Okay. Thank you for that. I think along the same vein, right, so with the new administration coming in starting in 2025, you had mentioned also expected budget hits this new fiscal year. There are a couple of questions that have bubbled up. I think one is sort of leading to the previous one around some concern with job security. Is there anything that folks need to worry about? In terms of that, will their positions or jobs be affected any way? The million-dollar question, but this came through, and related to that would also be for OER staff. Some are wondering if they will be ... they will have to come back to work on-site or if there are any foreseeable changes in the near future for forever.

Dr. Michael Lauer: This reminds me, I think it maybe it was my father or my grandmother, but he used to say things like, "It's time to get very worried. Details to follow." And so, I'm quite confident things are going to be okay. With an election, as Larry Tabak likes to say, all bets are off, and you don't really know what's going to happen. We have been through a number of administration changes over time. Of course, any new administration ... And we're going to have a new administration. Any new administration will have their set of priorities, and we will need to respond appropriately to them. And so, I think the thing to do, and, actually, Monica Bertagnolli has also said this, is let's just keep doing the great work that we do, and because that's what we can do and that's what we should do. Regarding whether or not there's going to be a change on policies of being in the physical workplace, we have nothing new to report on this. OER has taken a maximally flexible position over the last few years. That is exactly what we are continuing to do. We've been very open and transparent about that, and I have told colleagues and others that I think this is something that's worked very well for us. But if the powers that be, Congress, the White House, change things, then obviously we're going to have to respond to that. But I am not aware of anything that is bubbling at this time. So, yeah, an election always creates a certain degree of uncertainty. A new administration always creates a certain degree of uncertainty. But in contrast to what my father or grandmother used to say, it's not worth worrying. It just isn't. It's a lot of negative air ions that don't help any of us. And instead, we focus on continuing to do the great work that we do and continuing to enjoy the company engagement and support of our outstanding colleagues.

Dr. Nonye Harvey: Thank you, Mike. That is very comforting and good to know, that we have a very supportive leadership here. So, thank you for that, for that response. Obviously, a lot of uncertainty, and we continue to do the best we can, right, and support each other. So, I am looking for ... to see if there's another question. There's one here. I think this might be the final one we're able to touch on. So how does the recent Supreme Court of United of the United States decision regarding Chevron affect us and the work that we do? So, this was something that was ... that earlier, I think, in the summer, a change, and if you want to speak to that or give any insights on how that might affect our work.

Dr. Michael Lauer: Sure, so, BLUF, Bottom Line Up Front, probably not much. But let me just address this a little bit. So, the Chevron decision is a major Supreme Court decision. It has to do with the ability of federal agencies to use discretion in interpreting Congressional law. The thinking is that when Congress passes laws that are ambiguous, agencies that have expertise can use that expertise to decide how that law is going to be implemented and what it would mean. And courts, since the Chevron decision was made back in the ... I think the 1980s, courts have deferred to federal agencies. So, when people would complain that a federal agency is interpreting the law inappropriately, they would go to court, and the court would turn them down and say, "Based on Chevron, the courts are not in a position to make an interpretation of what the law means. We defer to the expertise of the agency." So, the recent decision ... There were actually two decisions that the Supreme Court made. These decisions essentially overrule Chevron, and the decisions state that actually the courts do have a role to play here, and the courts can overrule agencies and how they are interpreting law. So, if you're interested in this kind of stuff, it's worth reading about. I see Liza put in a blog ... a link there, which is worth looking at. Our OGC has advised us. That this is probably not going to affect our agency very much. Other agencies may be substantively affected, the FDA, which of course is, at its core, a regulatory agency, EPA, also at its core a regulatory agency. So, these agencies may see substantial changes in the way they conduct their work and also in the role that courts will play in overseeing their work. For us, probably not much.

Dr. Nonye Harvey: Good to know. Thank you. Thank you for that, Mike. I think we are at time now with our Q and A session. Thank you for the discussion. Thank you for the insights that you've shared, and really appreciate that. The slides will be shared, I think available 5 days after this meeting. So, I'm going to move on, kind of pivot to the next ... the last part of our meeting, and we'll invite Aesha to give us a few updates and tell us about the planned activities that EEC has for us. Aesha?

Aesha Brandy: Thank you so much, Nonye, and thank you, Mike, and Liza, for a very informative all-hands this afternoon. At this time, I just wanted to take a few moments just to talk about the OER EEC activities and some events we've had from the last year. We've had a great year, and we are truly grateful for the support of the OER leadership and staff. So, as you may have seen, we now have our "What's Up, OER?" newsletter, which replaces the OER Connector newsletter. "What's Up, OER?" is sent via e-mail every 2 weeks on Mondays and provides some updates and reminders of upcoming OER events and activities, administrative deadlines, required NIH training deadlines and upcoming development opportunities, so please be sure to check your e-mails for these newsletters. It's really a wealth of information. In addition to the "What's Up, OER?" we've had our all-hands meetings such as today's meeting, which are held twice a year. This is an opportunity for OER leadership just to provide updates and engage with OER staff. This last fiscal year, the EEC has had several engaging events to include our lunch box series. The next one is being held on November 12th, and the topic is stress management, just in time for the holidays, so we're really looking forward to that one. We've had our OER staff forum, which Mike and Liza discussed today, our OER 101, Summer Road Trip Challenge, Spirit Week, Virtual Holiday Party and so much more, as you can see on this slide. This year, we also created the OER Connection Corner Teams Channel for staff to just engage in real-time interaction. So, if you have not joined yet, we ask that you please do. You can find the link. It is in the slide deck that's attached to today's all-hands calendar invite. And our next big event that we have upcoming is our OER Fall In-Person Social. This is going to be held during our OER Spirit Week at Cabin John Regional Park. We have more details, and the official save-the-date is coming. Our OER in-person social committee is working very hard on this event, so we hope that you all will have a chance to join us. Obviously, I want to just take this opportunity to thank all of our current EEC members for just an amazing year of events and activities. We really could not have done this without you all, so thank you. Also, with some resources on the right-hand side, we have our OER staff intranet for the Employee Engagement Committee. If you have any questions or concerns, you can reach out to the OER EEC at oer-eec@nih.gov. And like I mentioned before, you can join the EEC Connection Corner on the Teams Channel. We also have our online suggestion and feedback form available. That's going to be coming soon, so be on the lookout for that as well. And at this time, Mike, and Liza, did you have any final comments or anything you wanted to say?

Dr. Michael Lauer: Liza?

Dr. Liza Bundesen: Just thank you all for being here and for all the hard work that you do and for being such wonderful colleagues.

Dr. Michael Lauer: Yeah, and I'll echo that, and I also want to thank the EEC for absolutely amazing work. It's wonderful to see such outstanding participation in the meeting today and wish you all the very best for the rest of the day, the rest of the week, the weekend and going forward.

Aesha Brandy: Thank you so much.

Dr. Nonye Harvey: Yeah. Thank you, everyone. Thank you, Aesha. I'd like to thank Aesha, as well, for kind of being one of the two leaders of EEC. And I've been with the committee for just a year, and I can certainly say that it's been a great experience and very impressed with how they try to engage the OERS as a group collectively and the many opportunities to be involved and get plugged in, so not just for the veterans on the call but also for new members, it's just a great way to learn about what's going on, get engaged and also meet colleagues, new colleagues outside of your office. And do not ignore the many e-mails that comes through your inbox. Those are really helpful, and I look forward to seeing folks at the in-person meeting events that we have planned in October. So, thank you, everyone. Thank you, Aesha. Thank you, Liza. Thank you, Mike for a great all-hands today.

Dr. Liza Bundesen: Thank you. Thank you.

Aesha Brandy: Goodbye.

Dr. Nonye Harvey: Thank you.

Aesha Brandy: Bye.