Research Enhancement Award (R15) Program

>> Michelle Hamlet: Good afternoon. My name is Michelle Hamlet. I'm a program officer at the National Institute of Nursing Research. Welcome to today's presentation on NIH R15 Program: Area and Reap Grants. Here are the topics that we'll be covering today. I'll give an overview of our 15 program goals. We'll walk through how to read key sections of the funding opportunity announcement. You'll learn how R15s are different from R01s regarding project design. I'll also help you understand the difference between the AREA program and the REAP program, and then I'll throw in some strategies for success in writing an application. The R15 FOA comes in four varieties. One is the Area Research Enhancement Award, or AREA, program. This is a program that's predominantly for undergraduate-focused institutions. In fact, it is for undergraduate-focused institutions. There is an FOA that does not allow clinical trials and an FOA that requires clinical trials, and those program announcement numbers are available on the screen. There's also the research enhancement award program, or REAP. This is a program for health professional and graduate schools, and like with the AREA program, there are two versions, one that requires a clinical trial, and one that does not require a clinical trial. The program goals of the R15 program are to strengthen basic and clinical research environment at institutions without significant NIH funding. Another goal is to support meritorious research, and finally, a very important goal of the R15 program is to expose students to primary research. Some key features of the program: It's a research grant mechanism. This is very important. It is not a training grant. It's not a research education program grant. It is a research grant mechanism. You can be awarded up to $300,000 direct cost to be spent over a 3-year period. The research strategy is limited to 12 pages, and the review criteria for the R15 are similar to that of the R01 with some slight differences that are specific to the R15 program, and we're going to go over those, and R15 grants are renewable. Regarding due dates for R15s, they are February 25th, June 25th, and October 25th. How does one distinguish an R15 from R01? The overall impact of an R15 is going to differ from an R01 program, taking into consideration the smaller scale of the research projects, and the scope also should be aligned with available and requested resources. R15s must describe opportunities for students to be exposed to research experiences, and it also must describe how the award will strengthen the research environment of the institution. So let's dive in with the eligibility criteria for an R15 program. Another very important part of the program of course is determining if faculty and the institution are eligible for apply for either one of these programs, so let's start from the perspective of the PI and PI eligibility. Keep in mind that the AREA and REAP programs are mutually exclusive and each targets a different pool of faculty. The REAP program, for example, is for faculty who are located at health professional schools or graduate schools. A health professional school might be, for example, a school of nursing that confers the BSN or MSN, or a school of dentistry, or college of pharmacy, et cetera. The AREA program, on the other hand, is directed for faculty who are at undergraduate-focused institutions, not health professional or graduate schools. An institution could in theory have faculty who are eligible for both AREA and REAP. However, an individual faculty member can only apply for one or the other R15 program, not both. We're going to go through an illustration to help get a sense, or give you a sense of what eligibility would look like from the perspective of one's faculty appointment. So here we have a schematic of three different college setups, if you will. On the far left, we have Mike. Mike is at an undergraduate-focused college, and so just based on that criterion, he could be eligible to apply for the AREA program. In the middle we have Marissa who, by the way, did the same post doc as Mike did. They were in the same lab, and she's at a small graduate school that confers advanced degrees and biomedical behavioral sciences. She could be eligible for REAP. On the far right, we have a complicated picture that is an entire university system that's made up of colleges and schools, so who here could be eligible for which type of R15 program? Let's start with Robby from the top left. He's at the College of Arts and Sciences, and this school has more undergraduate students than graduate students, so he could be eligible for the AREA program. Move to the right, we have Ken. Ken is at a College of Nursing, and in as much as a College of Nursing is a health professional school, he's likely going to be eligible for REAP. Moving down, we have Alice who is at a school of medicine. She could be eligible for the REAP program. Let's look at Cora. Cora is at a College of Engineering and Applied Sciences Institution or entity that has more undergraduate than graduate students. She's likely to be eligible for the AREA program. And finally, we have Manuel. He's at a School of Public Health that has more graduate students than undergraduate students. He's likely going to be eligible for the REAP program. So to sum that up, if the primary appointment of the faculty is at a graduate school or health professional school, they would apply for one of the REAP programs, clinical trials required or clinical trials not allowed. And if the faculty member is located at a predominantly undergraduate institution, they would be eligible possibly for the AREA program. Let's talk more about PI eligibility because that's pretty important. So one question that comes up is is it possible to have a multiple PI award that's an R15 award. It absolutely is possible, but all of the PIs named on the award must come from R15 eligible institutions. Now what about an ineligible collaborator? An ineligible collaborator who is listed as key personnel but not as a PI could be included in the application. However, you have to be mindful of the goals of the R15, which is to enhance the research environment of the applicant institution, the R15 eligible institution, and that these students, either undergrad or graduate students, must come from the R15 applicant institution. Other PI eligibility: The PI may not have another active NIH grant award at the time of receiving an R15 award. A PI though can be key personnel on someone else's NIH grant, and there are certain awards, instrumentation awards, conference grants, institutional training grants, that do not count against the eligibility of a PI to apply for an R15 program. Now let's talk about organization or institutional eligibility for the AREA program. This is where the financial part comes in and student representation comes in. So all non health professional parts of an institution must have no more than $6 million per year in 4 of the last 7 years of total NIH support. Health professional schools do not have to be included in this calculation. Undergraduate enrollment must be greater than graduate enrollment in the non-health professional schools. Let's see what that might look like. Go back to our schematic with our faculty members and see if they might be eligible for AREA based on the financial and undergraduate enrollment eligibility criteria. Say we have Mike on the left. Well, Mike is at a small undergraduate institution, and the college has $300,000 of NIH funding in the last 4 or 7 years. So Mike could be eligible still to apply for the AREA program. We know that Marissa is not eligible because she's at a graduate school. She could be eligible for REAP. And what about the complicated picture with the university system. Let's take a look. Well, we know we already identified that Manuel, Ken and Alice are not eligible for AREA at all, but what about Ravi and Cora? They each have an amount of NIH funding that would make them eligible to apply, and they also have more undergraduate students than graduate students. So they still would be eligible for apply for the AREA program. Now what about the institutional eligibility for the REAP program. This case is a little bit different. One has to take into account the entire institution, all of the schools and colleges that make up that university system, collectively must have no more than $6 million per year of NIH support in 4 of the last 7 years. This includes support for non-health professional schools, and health professional schools, I should add, and undergraduate enrollment is actually not a factor for eligibility for the REAP program. So let's talk about how this would work in our scenario. We know that Mike is out. He's AREA eligible. What about Marissa? She's at a graduate school that receives $3 million of NIH funding. She remains eligible for the REAP program based on her faculty appointment and the financial situation of the institution. Let's go to the more complicated system, the university system. We look at the funding levels collectively. In this case, we have to include how much funding each college and school receives. If we add that together, unfortunately no one would be eligible to apply for the REAP program based on the institution NIH funding financial status. But what if we were to change the amount of funding that one of the schools or colleges receives at the university system? How might that change things? So if we were to reduce the amount of funding that the school of medicine receives by half, and then add up the total amount of NIH funding that the entire university system receives, the REAP eligible faculty remain eligible to apply for REAP. Ravi and Cora, of course, would not be eligible because they are eligible for the AREA program. Another important aspect of an R15 application is the Provost letter. Both AREA and REAP require a signed letter from the Provost, or a similar official that verifies eligibility as specified in the appropriate FOA. Any applications that are submitted without this letter will be withdrawn and returned for review. We're now going to take a look at the application instructions. Before submitting an application, you want to first read the FOA carefully. Read the FOA carefully, and lastly, read the FOA carefully. Let's say you write an abstract or sketch out some specific aims. You can plug that into the matchmaker tool available from NIH Reporter, and you get a wealth of information in return. You can find out for example which institutes and centers support that type of research. You can get information on what types of activity codes support that research. Is it an R1 or R21, and how many? You can even get a sense of which study sections typically review applications on a given topic. Finally, you can see a list of the actual projects that are being supported, along with the abstracts and the PI's name and institution. You don't want to forget to also take a look at the institution's website, or institute's website, to get a sense of what the mission goals are, what the priority goals are, and of course, reach out to your program office. There's a list of program officers available at the end of each R15 FOA. Another important section to look out for in the FOA is the related notices section. You might be familiar with this section in the context of getting updates about using new forms as show below next to the arrow, and other information like that. But what you will also see, and maybe have seen in the past, and certainly will see more of, would be what's called a notice of special interest, or NOSI. The top arrow points to a NOSI. NOSIs provide an opportunity for an institute or center to highlight an area of interest or research priority where they are soliciting applications, and so you might find by looking through the NOSIs, there could be a very nice alignment between your research project and what the institute is particularly interested in. So don't forget to check those out. So now we're going to talk a little bit about the art of crafting in the R15 application. There really isn't anything on this slide that you probably haven't seen before, but specific to the R15 program is the focus on the students, and student involvement in the research projects. Describing the environment of the institution is also very important as well. I'll talk a little bit more about that in the next couple of slides. And so the FOA for the R15 does have some specific instructions in the areas shown here, facilities and other resources. This is where you want to talk about your institution's environment. For example, how about a profile of students who matriculate the institution? How many go on to get baccalaureate or advanced degrees? What do they end up doing? Where is the pool of students going to come from to participate in the research project? Is there a particular discipline that you're interested in targeting, and will there be enough students to participate in the REAP program? The biographical sketch is important because here you want to demonstrate your experience in working with and supervising students at either undergrad or graduate level, depending on the R15 you applied for. And if there are publications where students are co-authors, you want to highlight those, highlight the names of those students in those publications. And again, in the research strategy, you have to be explicit about what the students will be doing as active participants in the research project. It's also important to include a resource sharing plan that is required for an R15 application. Research strategy. Again, a lot of this you're probably familiar with, so of course you want to make sure that you're addressing the review criteria and program goals for the R15 program. Preliminary data can be included if you have it, keeping in mind that preliminary data will be reviewed as part of the application. And to reiterate again, it's important to demonstrate the appropriateness of the project in group, including, and I would say especially the students. And again, you have to describe how the students are going to be involved in the research program, and what will the oversight structure be. So you may be wondering, how might be students be involved in an R15 program? Well, there's some examples listed in the R15 FOAs, but here's an example of some of them provided here. Students can perform and troubleshoot experiments. They can present at lab meetings or campus conferences. They can help design experiments, collect and analyze data, draft articles and be involved in collaborative interactions. What you don't want to say in your application is, yeah, we have a couple of undergraduates. I'm not quite sure how many and what departments they're coming from, and we'll figure out something for them to do. That will not be acceptable. What you want to talk about I've shared several times, and that is to describe how the students are going to be involved in the research project, and also from where will the students be recruited. What academic level are you considering recruiting? Another very important thing to spell out quite clearly. Now about the budget. The R15 is a multi-year award, and so the budget for all three years must be requested in the first budget year. Of course, the budget justification should align with program goals, but it also has to include description of what the students are going to be doing in the research program. The budget also must include student salaries or wages. That has to be included in the budget. You can include a collaborator's salary, subaward, and some travel. I'll mention briefly about the R15 application review process, that they can be reviewed either by a special emphasis panel just for R15 applications, or they could be clustered with standing study sections. Reviewers of course will use the review criteria as listed in the FOA. So to sum up, for institutions, they must be an accredited public or non-profit private school that confers baccalaureate advanced degrees in biomed or behavioral sciences. A Provost letter must be included that confirms that the institution meets the eligibility requirements for a particular funding opportunity announcement. There are some activity codes that are listed here that do not count against the eligibility of the institution. And for applicants, again, this is a list that wouldn't surprise you. This is something standard that you would do for applying for any type of activity code or NIH funding opportunity. So being familiar with the FOA goals and review criteria, a compelling research topic that aligns with the institute of interest. And I will say, again, I alluded to this before, but I want to say it again, and that is that the R15 is not a training grant. It is not a research education award, and so therefore the focus is on the research and exposure of students to that research. So we expect to see a research project that includes heavy involvement of students. So please keep that in mind. Thank you very much for your time and attention, and I look forward to answering questions during the Q and A section. Thank you.