K Awards & UCSD’s K Award Writing Group

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NIH Research Training and Career Development Timetable

Approx. Stage of Research Training and Development

- GRADUATE/MEDICAL STUDENT
- POST DOCTORAL
- EARLY
- MIDDLE
- SENIOR

Mechanism of Support

- Predoctoral Institutional Training Grant (T32)
- Predoc Individual NRSA (F31)
- Predoc Individual MD/PhD NRSA (F30)
- Postdoc Institutional Training Grant (T32)
- Postdoctoral Individual NRSA (F32)
- Mentored Research Scientist Dev Award (K01)
- Mentored Clinical Scientist Dev Award (K08)
- Mentored Patient-Oriented RCDA (K23)
- Mentored Quantitative RCDA (K25)
- Independent Scientist Award (K02)
- Midcareer Investigator Award in Patient-Oriented Research (K24)
- Senior Scientist Award (K05)
How do I know which one is for me?

The NIH’s K Kiosk

Career Award Wizard

Read the Program Announcement

Talk to your mentor

K Award Writing Group

Talk to a Program Officer (PO) at the NIH
What is the funding climate like?
R Grant Success Rates 2015

R01 – 16.3%
R21 – 14.4%
R03 – 17.5%
K Award Success rates

K23 – 35%
K01 – 35%
K08 – 40%
K99 – 22.3%

Go to...
http://report.nih.gov/success_rates/
Preparing to apply for a K

Join “learning community”

Identify your theme “sweatshirt”

Get CV / Biosketch up-to-date & have mentor review of publications and prior grant activities

Increase publication record
- First author pubs that are data-based
- Find out norms for acceptable # of pubs
- Pubs should be in area of your proposed program of research
What can K Award Writing Group do for you?

• Guide you through the entire process
• Help you stay organized
• Accountability!
• Provide a supportive environment
• Help you identify mentors, training experiences
• Provide more feedback than you ever bargained for
How to get most out of the K Award Writing Group

- Attend regularly
- Commit to a homework assignment each time to help you move forward
- Read other people’s drafts before each meeting and come prepared with feedback
- Ask questions
- Circulate your drafts on a timely basis so that people can come prepared with comments
- Contribute to the discussion
Preparing to apply…

• Confirm the appropriate type of K and institute (NIMH, NHLBI, NCI, etc)
  – Does the appropriate institute offer that type of K? What do they offer?

• Identify the institute program officer
  – Invaluable as a source of information on the application process, fundability of your research project, assistance with application process, study section assignment

  – We / mentors will prep you for the call if desired
Preparing to apply

Find templates

– Email Rachel Tolano for examples
  – rtolano@ucsd.edu
– Freedom of Information Act

See what your target institute is funding

– NIH REPORTER is a searchable database of federally funded biomedical research projects.
The Proposal

Candidate Section
Specific Aims
Research Plan
Environment Statement
Career Development/Training Activities
Training in the Responsible Conduct of Research
Mentor Letters
Letters of Recommendation (former mentors)
Institutional Commitment
Mentor team

Primary mentor along with 2 to 4 mentors and/or consultants, significant contributors

Funded investigators who provide a unique expertise and training experience that maps onto the areas reflected in the research and training plans.

Experience mentoring a K is important for primary mentor
Hints about Mentors...

• Use your contacts to find the right mentors

• Be very clear and realistic about expectations.
  • Create a compact

• Learn the norms...
  – Talk to others who’ve had that mentor
  – How much time/training can I expect?
  – What is this person’s mentorship style?

• Be very aware of the busy schedules of mentors
  – Are there regular lab meetings, journal clubs, or other events that I can attend for contact with that mentor?
  – Is there any way that my training can assist their productivity?
Candidate statement

• An important part of your application
  – Must match your research proposed

• What is your Program of Research?
  – Think about the next 10 years
  – The broad question that excites you the most
  – How did your past experiences lead to this?
  – What is the initial step in that program?

• Show your intellectual journey

• They are looking for the next rock star. Be it!
Common pitfalls overall

Lack of focus is biggest problem for new investigators.

There is a tendency to try to “solve the world’s problems” in a single application (feasibility)

Specific Aims are not very specific

Disconnects between Candidate, Training Plan, Mentors, Aims, and Research Plan

Not innovative, too close to mentors work
Common pitfalls research plan

Major design flaws

Insufficient statistical power

Imprecise measures (dependent variables)

Not clear you can recruit the needed population

The data would not be sufficient to support the next step you have described in the research

Too ambitious!
The bottom line

• You need to have a good idea that is a significant issue, preliminary/pilot data, a well crafted approach, a solid research team and a supportive environment to earn a highly meritorious score.

• Luck never hurts, too.