

March 31, 2023

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RE: Seeking Stakeholder Input on Enhancing Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility across NIAID Extramural Activities

The American Society for Biochemistry and Molecular Biology is an international nonprofit scientific and educational organization that represents more than 11,000 students, researchers, educators and industry professionals. The ASBMB strongly advocates for strengthening the science, technology, engineering and mathematics (STEM) workforce, supporting sustainable funding for the American research enterprise, and ensuring diversity, equity and inclusion in STEM.

The ASBMB is strongly encouraged by the National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Diseases' request for information from stakeholders on its diversity efforts. Working with the scientific community to increase diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusivity is a vital step to ensure a more fair and equitable research ecosystem.

The ASBMB recommends the following:

Recommendation 1: Expand diversity supplements and modify criteria

Diversity supplements are severely underutilized by the scientific community. According to one study, in 2020, [only 4.5% of active R01 grants](#) had ever received a diversity supplement, suggesting that diversity supplements are infrequently awarded. The same study revealed that the percent of R01 grants awarded by NIAID that are associated with diversity supplements is less than 1%. As NIH's second-largest funder, NIAID's number of diversity supplements should closer reflect the number of eligible parent grants. The ASBMB recommends the NIAID conduct targeted outreach to underrepresented communities and investigators who serve in them to disseminate necessary information on diversity supplements, including how to apply for them, and eligibility criteria.

In addition, the definition of racial/ethnic minority varies across different NIH institutes as regards diversity supplements, creating uncertainty for individuals belonging to ethnic minority groups that are not listed in the program announcement. The current NIAID criteria do not state any Asian group eligible for diversity supplements, although [certain Asian groups are underrepresented in the biomedical sciences](#). The ASBMB suggests that the NIAID disaggregate Asian groups and post eligible racial and ethnic groups to its diversity supplement announcement to ensure that all qualified applicants can take part in NIAID diversity programming.

Recommendation 2: Continue offering and consider expanding re-entry supplements

Many NIH institutes offer re-entry and re-integrations supplements to aid scientists who attempt to re-enter the scientific workforce after a prolonged leave. Women disproportionately leave the STEM

workforce to fulfill [child-rearing duties or to care for family members with an illness](#). Moreover, [sexual harassment](#) or other forms of discrimination result in more talent leaving the scientific enterprise. To retain and attract underrepresented scientists back into the research enterprise, the NIAID should offer more re-entry and re-integration supplements and broadcast these opportunities widely.

There are many pathways leading into scientific careers and out of them; varied experiences from individual scientists create a diverse, fruitful, innovative research ecosystem. Providing more opportunities for individuals to re-enter the scientific enterprise will benefit the innovation pipeline. The ASBMB strongly recommends that the NIAID continue to offer and consider expanding re-entry and re-integrative research supplements.

Recommendation 3: Support scientists with disabilities

Scientists with disabilities [face numerous barriers](#) to fully participating in the U.S. scientific enterprise, such as communication challenges, lack of access to high-quality support services and lack of STEM role models and mentors, to name just a few. The ASBMB urges the NIAID to conduct outreach to institutions serving students with disabilities in STEM, offer infrastructure supplements to update labs to be ADA accessible and meet the principles of universal design, and ensure that all program announcements are formatted to reach every scientist. In addition, the society strongly recommends that the NIAID offer funding for disability research. Recent, [NIH-funded research has identified health and health care disparities affecting disability](#) groups in screening and preventative services, comorbid health conditions, and reproductive health, to name a few. To meet the growing healthcare needs of these groups, the NIAID should conduct and fund disability-related health disparities research as it relates to the institute's mission.

Recommendation 4: Establish an institute-wide equity plan to expand diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion programs

To centralize the institute's plan for expanding diversity, equity, accessibility and inclusion programs, the ASBMB strongly recommends that the NIAID create an equity action plan similar to the National Institute of Drug Abuse's [Racial Equity Initiative action plan](#). When developing the action plan, the NIAID should include goals to provide mechanisms for health disparities research and to recruit and retain people from underrepresented groups. Mechanisms should include training programs to diversify NIAID's intramural and extramural programs and funding opportunities to support early-career investigators from underrepresented groups. Additionally, the NIAID should partner with NIH's UNITE program, affinity groups and professional societies such as [Black in Immunology](#), the [American Indian Science and Engineering Society](#), the [Society for the Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science](#) and the [Association on Higher Education and Disability](#) when developing the equity action plan as well as hold listening sessions to collect feedback from the scientific community.

Recommendation 5: Recruit and retain diversity staff and investigators through collaboration and outreach

To improve diversity in the NIAID's intramural and extramural programs, the ASBMB suggests that the institute establish additional programming and boost outreach related to current programming to recruit talent broadly: from early-career to established investigators. While the NIAID has programs such as the

[Intramural NIAID Research Opportunities \(INRO\)](#) program and participates in the [Maximizing Opportunities for Scientific and Academic Independent Careers \(MOSAIC\)](#) program, information about the programs is not widely publicized. We recommend the NIAID establish a partnership program similar to the [NIH–Penn Immunology Graduate Partnership Program](#) with minority-serving institutions and predominately undergraduate institutions. For recruiting midcareer and established investigators, we suggest NIAID participate in the [Intergovernmental Personnel Act \(IPA\) mobility program](#).

Recommendation 6: Collect and report on data of underrepresented groups

Proper allocation of resources requires knowledge of groups you are targeting. However, data collection from certain underrepresented groups such as individuals who are LGBTQIA+ has often gone overlooked. We urge NIAID to include LGBTQIA+ individuals when collecting data on underrepresented groups so that the institute will be better positioned to provide resources such as funding opportunities or [safe zone](#) training for extramural LGBTQIA+ trainees and investigators.

Moreover, we suggest that the NIAID also collect and report data on [institution types](#) that serve underrepresented groups such as minority-serving institutions and predominately undergraduate institutions. Data on these types of institutions will assist the NIAID in formulating outreach efforts to build a more diverse extramural scientific workforce.

For further questions or discussion, please contact Sarina Neote, Director of Public Affairs, at publicaffairs@asbmb.org.