Helping Your Mentees
Develop a Competitive
K Award Application
(K01, K07, K08, K23, K25, K99)

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NIH Criteria for Evaluating Candidates

– Potential for conducting research.
– Evidence of originality.
– Adequacy of scientific background.
– Quality of research endeavors or publications to date.
– Need for further research experience and training.
NIH Criteria for Evaluating the Primary Mentor

– Appropriateness of mentor’s research qualifications in the area of the application.
– Quality and extent of mentor’s role in providing guidance and advice to candidate.
– Previous experience in fostering the development of more junior researchers.
– History of productivity and support.
– Adequacy of support for the research project.
Helping Candidates Develop a Strong Career Development Training Plan

• Understand the intent of the mentored K award – which is to help new investigators achieve independence (i.e., to compete successfully for R01-level funding).

Therefore, preparing for the R01 grant application that the candidate will submit at the end of the K award should be the organizing principle of the K grant application, which includes both a training plan and a research plan.
Career Development Training Plans

• Make a compelling argument why the mentee needs a K award.
  – Identify critical gaps or deficiencies in the mentee’s knowledge or skills.
  – Explain how additional training or mentored research experience in these areas will enable the mentee to compete successfully for R01 funding.
  – Be specific; provide examples.
Career Development Training Plans

• Develop a career development training plan that is *uniquely* suited to the mentee.
  – Given their previous training and research experience, mentees should propose a mix of didactic training and hands-on research experience that address the gaps or deficiencies in their knowledge or skills.
  – Fully exploit the training opportunities available.
  – The training plan should be as carefully thought out and presented as the research plan.
Helping Candidates Develop a K Award Research Plan

• 3 things to remember when designing a research plan for a K award:

  1. The research plan is a training vehicle. The research plan should be well integrated with the candidate’s training plan and provide an opportunity to acquire new skills.

  2. The research plan is a means to achieve independence. The research plan should be viewed as a precursor for the next state of research – ideally, an R01.
3. Mentored K awards provide limited funding. The scope of the research plan needs to be appropriate and feasible, given the modest funding provided by a mentored K award ($25K-$50K/year).

A “modular” approach is possible, which might include several small projects, such as secondary analyses of existing data, leveraging ongoing studies, or conducting a small pilot studies.

All aims should be relevant and integral to the subsequent R01 grant application.
Institutional Commitment

• NIH evaluation criteria
  – Applicant institution’s commitment to the scientific development of the candidate and assurances that the institution intends the candidate to be an integral part of its research program.
  – Applicant institution’s commitment to protect at least 75% of the candidate’s effort for proposed career development activities.