

Helping Your Mentees Develop a Competitive K Award Application

(K01, K07, K08, K23, K25, K99)

Thomas Mitchell, MPH

Dept. of Epidemiology and Biostatistics

June 2008

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.

K Award Research Plans

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.