



## **NIGMS Request for Information: Maximizing Investigators' Research Award**

**July 28, 2014**

The National Institute of General Medical Science (NIGMS) of the National Institutes of Health (NIH) recently issued a time-sensitive Request for Information (RFI) for input to assist in its planning for a potential new program tentatively called the Maximizing Investigators' Research Award (MIRA). According to NIGMS, MIRA is intended to be a grant in support of all of the research supported by the institute in an investigator's laboratory. The Institute is planning to issue a Funding Opportunity Announcement to test the new program on a pilot scale. Accordingly, it is seeking feedback from the scientific community.

During the July meeting of the NIH Scientific Management Review Board (SMRB), NIH director Francis Collins raised the issue of whether in difficult times science agencies should shift a larger proportion of their research dollars into funding investigators, as opposed to projects that can be very detailed in terms of what the proposal says the investigator is going to do (see [related story](#)).

According to the RFI, the Institute is attempting to address the consequences of its funding mechanisms, including efficiency and efficacy, associated with providing basic research support to individual investigators via a pilot program to fund investigators' overall research programs. The hope is that the new mechanism will:

- Increase the stability of funding for NIGMS-supported investigators, which could enhance their ability to take on ambitious scientific projects and approach problems creatively.
- Increase flexibility for investigators to follow important new research directions as opportunities arise, rather than being bound to specific aims proposed in advance of the studies.
- Improve the distribution of funding among the nation's highly talented and promising investigators to increase overall scientific productivity and the chances for important breakthroughs.
- Reduce the time spent by researchers writing and reviewing grant applications, in the long term.

NIGMS director Jon Lorsch noted in a recent post on the [NIGMS Feedback Loop Blog](#) that, "it's important to note that MIRAs are not intended to be a method for supporting only a perceived elite group of investigators or promoting only high-risk, high-potential-reward research. Our intent is to pilot a program that might transform how we support fundamental biomedical research, creating a more productive, efficient and sustainable enterprise."

The proposed award would provide support for a lab's research program. Supported researchers would have the freedom to explore new avenues of inquiry that arise during the course of their work as long as it is related to NIGMS' mission and does not require additional review for regulatory compliance. The award would be renewable with funding ranging from \$150,000 to \$750,000 in direct costs per year, depending on recommendations of the study section and the NIGMS Council, as well as staff evaluation of the needs and expected productivity and impact of the program. MIRA would also take into consideration the support the investigator receives from other sources in deciding funding levels for the award. Up to \$150,000 in administrative supplement support for the purchase of equipment would be allowable per grant cycle. The median direct costs for MIRAs would be higher than the current median investigator-initiated (R01) award direct cost at the Institute. The award would be for five years, a year longer than the current average for a NIGMS R01. The Program Director/Principal Investigator (PD/PI) would be expected to commit at least 50 percent research effort.

According to the RFI, review of the application would emphasize a holistic evaluation of the investigator's track record and the overall potential importance of the proposed research program, without focusing on specific project details. Specific aims would not be required. The process would include peer review using existing criteria and processes but would be tailored to address the particular features of the MIRA.

Reviewers for the award would be asked to address additional factors in addition to the standard review criteria. The RFI includes a possible implementation plan that includes two paths:

- (1) In lieu of a competitive renewal, PDs/PIs who currently have two or more NIGMS R01s could apply. The budget would be higher than that for any of the individual awards the investigator has, but usually less than the total of all of their NIGMS support.
- (2) The program would be open to Early Stage Investigators (ESIs), bringing a cadre of ESIs into the system who would be directly compared to other NIH-supported ESIs funded through traditional mechanisms. MIRA would be considered a substantial, independent NIH research award that disqualifies an individual from being classified as an ESI.

The Institute invites comments on four specific topics, but comments are not limited to these topics:

- (1) The merits of this funding program for established and early stage investigators.
- (2) The likelihood that established and early stage investigators would apply.
- (3) Concerns about the proposal.
- (4) Suggestions for changes to improve the proposal or associated processes.

Comments must be submitted to [https://www.research.net/s/NewGrantProgram\\_gov](https://www.research.net/s/NewGrantProgram_gov) by August 15, 2014. Additional information is available [here](#).

