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LETTERS

Funding of Newly Submitted NIH Grant Applications

Data provided in public statements by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) indicate that the overall success rate, that is, funding of investigator-initiated research project grants (RPGs), is about 1 in 4. For the past few years, a number of scientists in the biomedical community have questioned these data on the basis of impressions that the funding of newly submitted R01 applications seemed appreciably less likely.

The National Caucus of Basic Biomedical Science Chairs requested additional data from NIH to explain this apparent discrepancy. As fiscal year 1994 data are not available until later in 1994, the latest figures available from NIH are for fiscal year 1993. They show an overall success rate (number of grants paid divided by the number of applications reviewed) for RPGs of 24.5%. This rate includes several kinds of grants, including those to First Independent Research Support and Transition (FIRST) award (R29) applicants as well as competing renewal (Type 2 R01) applications. The success rate for competing new (Type 1) R01 research project applications was only 15.4% in fiscal year 1993 (Table 1). In contrast, other RPG applications did somewhat better. For example, Type 2 R01 applications had a success rate of 36.1%, and R29 applications from newly independent investigators had a success rate of 26.8%.

Table 1. Success rates for fiscal year 1993 NIH competing research project applications (RPG) new type 1 unsolicited proposals (R01 and R29 only).

NIH institute	Success rate (%)	
	Traditional awards (R01)	FIRST awards (R29)
NIAAA	15.5	33.3
NIA	14.6	34.0
NIAID	18.2	28.9
NIAMS	11.5	18.3
NCI	14.0	27.1
NIDA	22.5	35.5
NIDCD	21.9	43.2
NIDR	18.9	37.9
NIDDK	11.9	26.4
NIEHS	15.2	13.0
NEI	24.5	39.5
NIGMS	17.5	25.4
NICHD	13.3	19.8
NCHGR	16.9	0.0
NHLBI	14.4	25.1
NIMH	11.1	27.7
NCNR	14.1	16.7
NINDS	16.4	25.4
NCRR	26.8	50.0
NIH weighted average	15.4	26.8

These results confirm the experience of many applicants that the likelihood of funding a new R01 application on its first review cycle in fiscal year 1993 was much less than 25%, having been as low as 11.1% for the National Institute of Mental Health. These are the traditional, unsolicited, investigator-initiated applications that have been the heart of the NIH extramural program and on which so many major advances in biomedical research have depended. We fear that the success rate for fiscal year 1994 could be further diminished. This information will help lawmakers and other governmental officials responsible for NIH budget appropriations to become more aware of the funding difficulties experienced by biomedical scientists. The extremely low likelihood of permitting excellent research ideas to be pursued at the present time implies that many outstanding peer-reviewed projects now are being denied funding. This lack of funding will adversely affect the quality of life by impeding seriously the progress toward the cure and prevention of disease. Breakthroughs in biotechnology that have signaled major advances for mankind and the U.S. economy could also be delayed.

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EMBL and European Cooperation in the Life Sciences

At its November meeting, the European Molecular Biology Laboratory (EMBL) Council, representing the 15 member states of EMBL, voted unanimously for two important decisions. Formulated in close cooperation between the Director-General and the Council, they deal with two distinct aspects of enhancing cooperation in the life sciences in Europe.

The first decision deals with an initia-