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# Early Independence Award Program

## Preliminary Results: Process Evaluation

Council of Councils Overview

August 15, 2011



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# Early Independence Award Program

## Purpose

To provide a mechanism for exceptional, early career scientists to omit traditional post-doctoral training, and establish an independent research program. Junior scientists must receive Ph.D. or complete medical residency within 12 months (before or after) of application submission date.

## Review Process

- Electronic review by outside experts (Stage 1 review)
- Editorial board review (Stage 2 review)
  - In- person interview with each of the 25 finalists
- Recommendation by Council of Councils and final selection by NIH Director

## Award

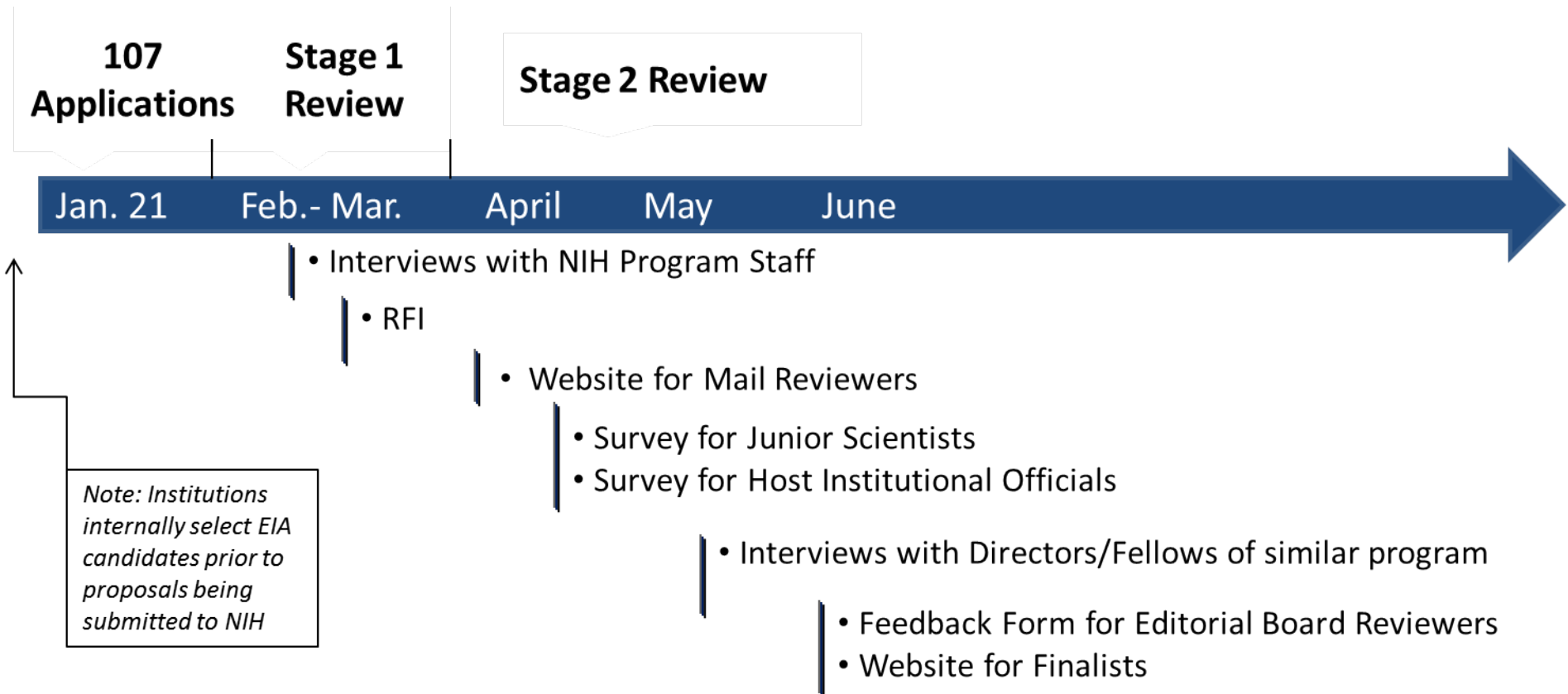
- RFA-RM-10-019: Posted 10/6/2010; Application Due Date 1/21/2011
- 10 total awards anticipated in pilot year
- Awards will be for up to \$250,000 in direct costs each year for 5 years



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## Feedback Process





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## Preliminary Findings

- Most junior scientists applied with their current institution where they held post-doctoral or faculty positions
- Institutions' challenges: Understanding eligibility requirements, integrating this novel position into existing structures, and committing support to external candidates
- Junior scientists' challenges: writing the NIH proposal in limited time due to institutions approval timeline, securing collaborators support, generating preliminary data, and determining level of detail to include in proposal



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## Preliminary Findings

- RFI respondents and EIA applicants felt time between RFA release and application deadline was short, considering the internal selection/approval process at institutions
- No common understanding of the qualities of an “exceptional” junior scientist among reviewers and applicants
- Mixed opinions about the program: Most junior scientists were very supportive, while some RFI respondents did not understand or agree with the premise of the program



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## Preliminary Findings

- Junior scientists were evenly split on strategies for connecting host institutions with candidates – maintaining current system, having NIH match investigators with institutions, and giving the money to institutions to recruit candidates
- Most editorial board reviewers felt two-stage review process worked well, and 30 minute interview format was excellent
- Most Important Review Criteria were *Approach*, followed by *Significance* in Stage 1, and *Investigator*, followed by *Environment* in Stage 2
- Stage 1 reviewers requested more guidance on assigning weights to institutional support and commitment, and letters of reference



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## Preliminary Recommendations

- Operationalize the qualifications of an “exceptional” junior scientist so reviewers, institutions, and potential candidates have the same interpretation
- Increase awareness and educate host institutions about the goals of the program
- Create a centralized database consisting of interested institutions
- Increase the time between the release of RFA and application deadline





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## Preliminary Recommendations

- Consider providing options to stage 1 reviewers with only one application to calibrate their scores with other reviewers
- Include a standard set of questions or items to address in letters of references
- Clearly state to reviewers which criteria should be weighted more heavily when providing overall impact score
- Consider holding the interview in a room conducive to better interaction between finalists and editorial board reviewers
- Provide finalists with information on the qualifications that will be assessed during the interview
- Increase the number of awards