

Title of proposed program: Increasing Diversity in the Biomedical Research Workforce

Submitting Source: NIH

What is the major obstacle/challenge/opportunity that the Common Fund should address?

The National Institutes of Health has a vested interest in achieving a sustainable, diverse, and productive U.S. biomedical research workforce. The best and brightest young people must be recruited into science careers if the US is to maintain its preeminent status in the world of science and innovation. Nevertheless our current census of principal investigators is dominated by male caucasians. As the diversity of our population increases, this is a severe restriction on our ability to enlist the best minds of the nation on our most critical problems. Over the past 30 years, several programs have been put in place to attempt to change this trend, but they have not been as successful as hoped. Clearly, reversal of this situation requires a better understanding of its basis. This Common Fund program will be informed by the Advisory Committee to the Director (ACD) Working Group on the Diversity of the Biomedical Research Workforce. As data are gathered through this program, they should inform future iterations of Workforce initiatives to support recruitment and retention of diverse groups into all sectors of the workforce.

What would the goals of the program be?

The overarching goal will be to increase the recruitment and retention of a more diverse biomedical research workforce by creating enabling research environments at a more diverse set of institutions around the country. This overarching goal will be broken into concrete objectives as further strategic planning is conducted following receipt of advice on this topic from the ACD.

Why is a trans-NIH strategy needed to achieve these goals?

Increasing the quality of the workforce through recruitment and retention of the best and brightest students is essential for the entire NIH mission. If successful, the mechanisms established through this program must be adapted by the NIH as a whole, so they should be established via a coordinated effort that involves all the ICs.

What initiatives might form the strategic plan for this topic?

The design of specific initiatives will require further planning. This is a complex topic which has been the subject of a special ACD task force over the past year. Their advice will help define the specific Common Fund initiatives.

If a Common Fund program on this topic achieved its objectives, what would be the impact?

If this program is successful, the quality of the US biomedical workforce will be enhanced by virtue of having a vastly increased population to draw from. This workforce will be more diverse and will therefore also be enhanced by virtue of having many perspectives that contribute to our biggest challenges.