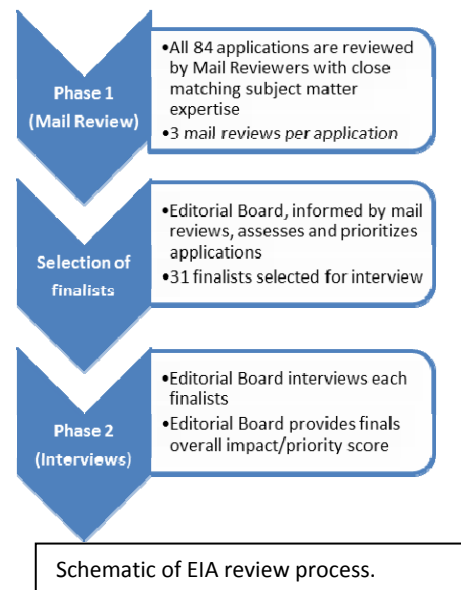


Fact Sheet -- Information on the Early Independence Award (EIA) Review Process (2013)

The Common Fund's NIH Director's Early Independence Award (EIA) initiative, is designed to accelerate the entry of exceptional junior investigators into positions of independent research by providing support within one year before or after receipt of the terminal research degree or completion of residency, thereby omitting the traditional post-doctoral training period. The initial review uses a two-phase, "Editorial Board" style process with explicit emphasis placed on the qualities of the investigator and on the environment provided by the host institution. The second level of review, performed by the Council of Councils, assesses the initial review for fairness and uniformity in the application of review criteria and culminates in a vote for *en bloc* concurrence with the recommendations of the initial review group.

Initial Review Process

- 86 applications were received in January 2013. Each institution (as defined by a unique DUNs number) can submit up to two applications. All applications were reviewed by NIH staff for completeness and compliance.
- Based on the administrative review, 2 applications were withdrawn. One was a duplicate application by an applicant and other was a third application submitted by the same institution.
- The 84 remaining applications were sent forward to mail review. Mail reviewers were recruited by the Center for Scientific Review (CSR). Mail reviewer assignment is based on close matching of reviewer expertise to application topic. The ECB Home Page provides links to all applications and summary statements.
- 234 mail reviewers provided 252 written critiques for all 84 applications, 3 reviews per application, in accordance with NIH peer review procedures, using review criteria outlined in [FOA RM-12-018](#).
- The mail reviewer critiques were then made available to the Editorial Board (EB), which consisted of 13 distinguished, broad-thinking scientists. Informed by these critiques, the EB assigned preliminary priority scores to their assigned applications. EB panelists were also able to provide a "top 5" designation for reviewed applications.
- Following preliminary scoring of all 84 applications, EB selected 30 finalists to be invited for a Phase 2 face-to-face editorial board interview. One was added administratively to ensure consistency in interviewee selection.
- At a face-to-face EB Review meeting on June 24-25, 2013 in Washington, D.C., each of the 31 finalists gave a 5 min. presentation followed by 15 min. Q&A session with the EB. Following the Q&A session, the EB discussed the applicant during a 10 minute closed-door session and assigned the final priority score. The EB members were instructed to use the entire range of scores. This concluded the second and final stage of the initial review process.
- The 53 applications not selected as finalists received a summary statement composed of the three mail reviewer critiques and were considered as "Not Discussed." The summary



statements for the 31 applications that were selected for interviews included the mail reviewer critiques plus a brief paragraph describing the main issues of the EB discussion.

- The Editorial Board and Mail Review rosters are available at <http://www.csr.nih.gov/SummaryStatementRoster/BBBP201308.pdf>.

Initial Review Focus

- The first tier of the NIH peer review process, the scientific and technical review of applications, is the responsibility of the initial peer review group at the Center for Scientific Review.
- The model used to review these applications is called a two-stage Editorial Board format. Phase 1 reviewers are experts in the respective fields of the application, and they are responsible for evaluating specific scientific and technical merits. Phase 2 Editorial Board members are broad-vision scientific leaders who are responsible for evaluating the overall impact of the applications as they pertain to the goals of this specific program. Editorial Board members do not write specific critiques for each application. Their comments are captured in the resume of discussions.
- Significance, investigator, innovation, approach, and environment were the primary determinants of scientific merit used by Phase 1 mail reviewers. They were also instructed to comment on the programmatic emphasis on investigator and environment (institutional support).
- For the Editorial Board, the focus was on the following considerations:
 - Is the Principal Investigator an exceptional individual with the scientific creativity, intellectual sophistication, maturity, and readiness to initiate an independent research career?
 - Has the applicant institution committed to provide the Principal Investigator with scientific freedom, ample resources, collaborating faculties, and protected time to develop an independent research program?
 - Is there evidence that the proposed project will develop into an independent research program that will have a sustained impact to the field?

Role of the Council of Councils

- Review by an Advisory Council constitutes the "second level" of the two-tiered peer review process. The primary purpose of the second level of review is for the Council to advise the Director, DPCPSI, about the appropriateness of the initial review. Specifically, the second level review ensures that the initial review was conducted with appropriate expertise, procedures, and lack of conflict. The Advisory Council is not tasked with re-reviewing the applications for scientific or technical merit.
- While all applications will receive second-level of review via teleconference by the NIH Council of Councils on August 15, 2013, the review will focus on the overall initial review process, (e.g., expertise, procedures and lack of conflict) not on individual applications. Therefore, the official motion will be for concurrence with the initial review's overall recommendations. Senior staff from the NIH Center for Scientific Review will be present to respond to any questions about the initial review process.
- Although the applications will be reviewed *en bloc*, individual applications may be raised for discussion by Council members or NIH staff. In addition, applications with human subject or vertebrate animal subject concerns have been identified, and the concerns will be resolved if an award is to be made.
- As stated in the RFA, the NIH Common Fund intends to commit approximately \$4 million (total costs) in FY 2013 to the EIA initiative. The ICs have been encouraged to embrace and

support any applications that are relevant to their missions as that will simply allow Common Fund funds to go further.

- The development of the funding plan will involve input from the ICs and will be based on scientific merit, programmatic priorities, Council recommendations, availability of funds, and other factors.
- Prior to the August 15, 2013 meeting the Council members are requested to review the background materials posted on the ECB.
- If a Council member wishes to raise one or more individual applications for discussion at the August 15 meeting, s/he should contact Ms. Robin Kawazoe, the Executive Secretary of the Council, by August 13 to allow NIH staff to prepare information for discussion. (Her e-mail address is kawazoer@mail.nih.gov, and her telephone number is 301-402-9852.)
- If an individual application is raised for discussion, members with conflicts will be asked to leave the meeting room for the duration of that discussion.
- The entire Council will conduct the *en bloc* vote for concurrence with the initial level of review. All members can participate in the *en bloc* vote, since it does not involve the discussion of individual applications.

Program Recommendations

- The Common Fund High-Risk High-Reward Working Group, with broad representation across the ICs, will serve as a resource in developing a funding plan. The Director, DPCPSI will approve the final funding plan in consultation with the IC Directors.

Additional information on the background and scope of the EIA initiative – including links to information about previous awards – is available on the NIH Common Fund website:
<http://commonfund.nih.gov/earlyindependence/>.