

Common Fund Early Independence Award: Recommendations for Eligibility Adjustments

Council of Councils Discussion

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WORLD VIEW

A personal take on events

K. WOLF/NATURE



Scientists need a shorter path to research freedom

Francis Collins explains why the NIH is launching a bid to help some doctoral students dramatically reduce the time required to start an independent career.

For the most creative of young scientists, nothing can equal the chance to have a lab of one's own.

Early Independence Award Program ...will support creative young scientists to pass almost immediately from completing a PhD to running their own laboratories.

inged | encouraging forward thinking, but it may still be a halfway solution.
ining | For the most creative of young scientists, nothing can equal the chance

To provide such opportunities, several programmes aimed at promoting greater independence at earlier career stages have over the years, producing some

Applicants will need to work with the institution's academic leaders to negotiate an independent position that would be activated if they win an award.

Salient Features of the EIA Initiative

- Candidate eligibility: Candidate must receive terminal research degree or complete medical residency within 12 months (before or after) of application submission date
- Host Institution: Only two applications per institution (as defined by DUNS number) may be submitted
- Candidate and host institution must “match up” with each other and prepare application together (candidate for research plan and institution for facilities and environment)
- Focus in application and review processes are on the qualities of the candidate as well as the support and commitment of the host institution
- Early Independence Awards have been made for 4 years.
(Awards for year 5 are pending.)

Is the EIA initiative fostering earlier independence for awardees?

Rather than use titles to distinguish who is independent and who is not, use operational definition. For example, from the K99/R00 FOA:

Evidence for non-independence may include:

- The candidate's research is entirely funded by another investigator's grants.
- The candidate's research is conducted entirely in another investigator's assigned space.
- According to institutional policy, the candidate cannot hire postdoctoral fellows or technical staff or be the responsible supervisor of graduate students.
- According to institutional policy, the candidate is not allowed to submit an application as the PD/PI of an NIH research grant application (e.g., R01).
- The candidate lacks other rights and privileges of faculty, such as attendance at faculty meetings.

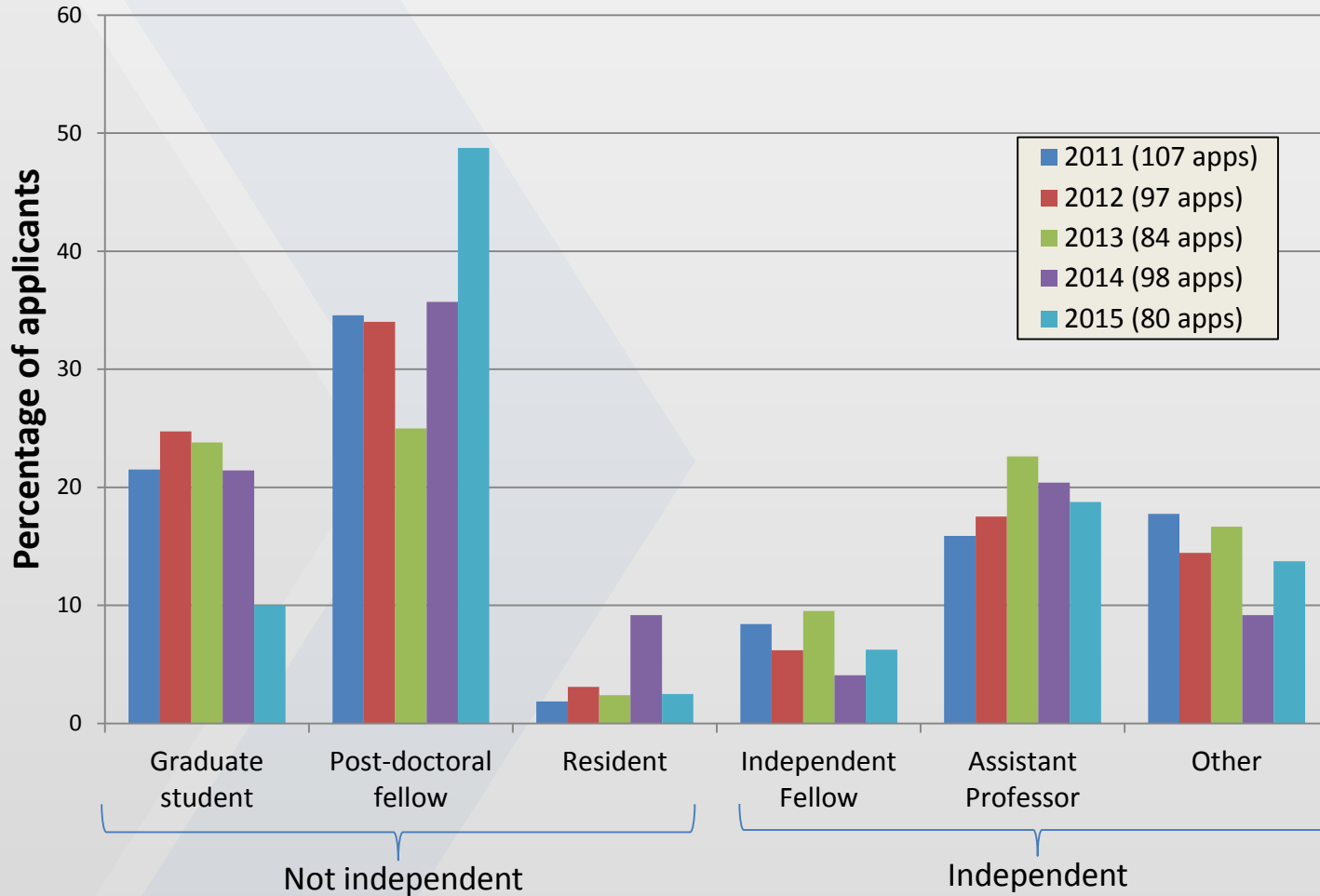
Conversely, evidence for independence, and therefore lack of eligibility, includes:

- The candidate has a full-time faculty position.
- The candidate received a start-up package for support of his/her independent research.
- The candidate has research space dedicated to his/her own research.
- The candidate may attend faculty meetings, be the responsible supervisor for graduate students, and/or hire technical support or postdoctoral fellows.
- The candidate is eligible to apply for independent research funding as the PD/PI of an NIH research grant.

If the intent of the EIA is to allow earlier independence, we would expect them to move from a non-independent position to an independent position.

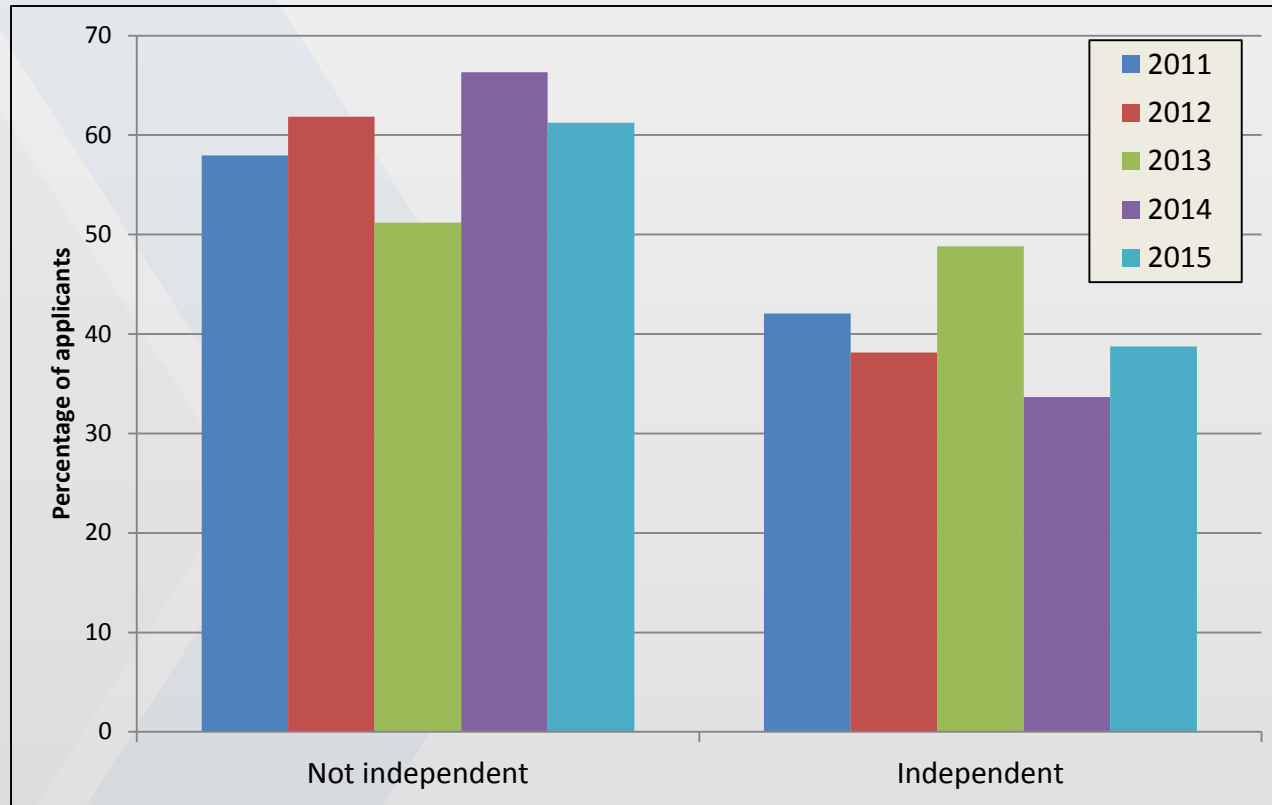
Analysis of whether EIA is promoting earlier independence

Appointment status of applicants at time of application



Analysis of whether EIA is providing early independence

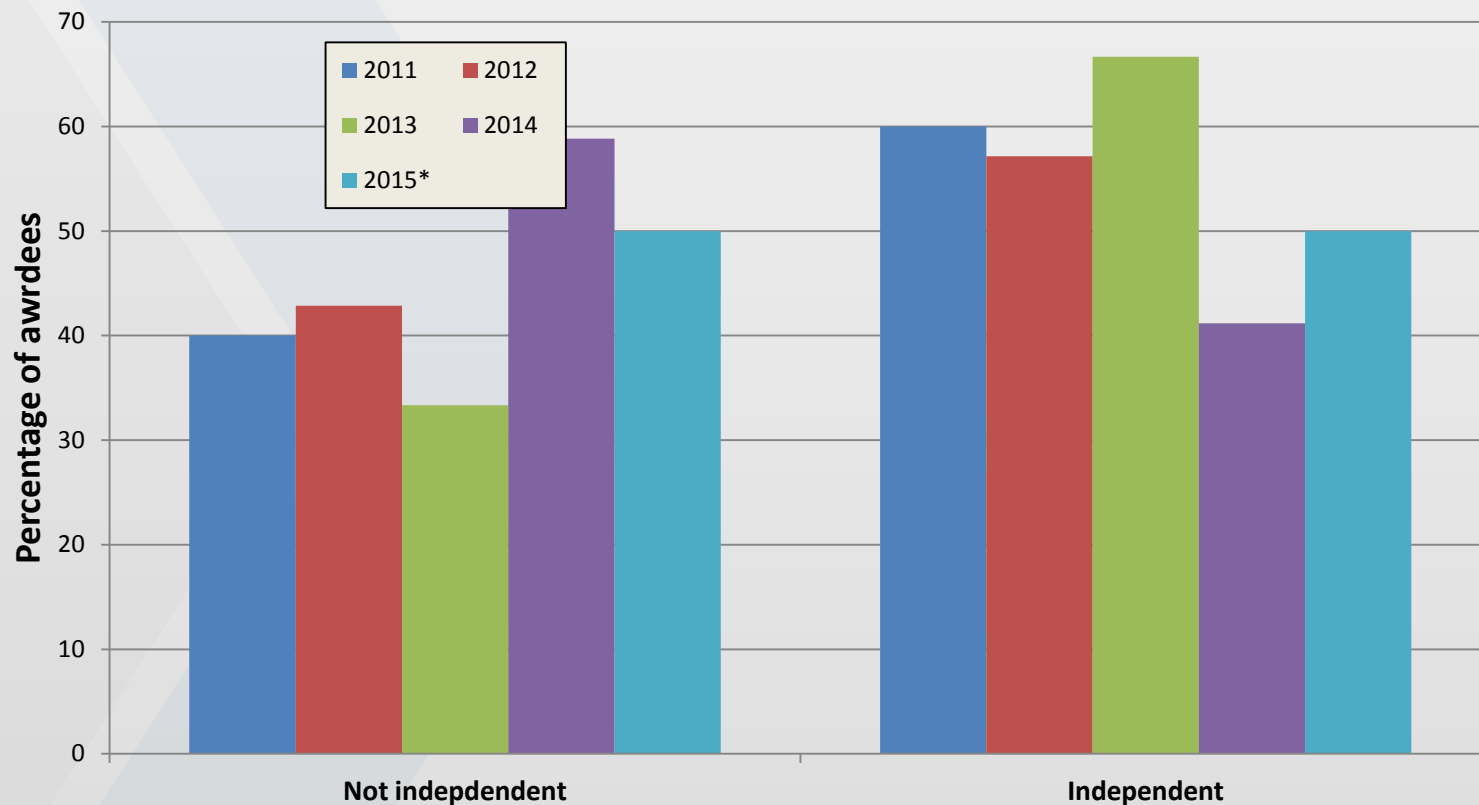
Independence status of applicants at time of application



- Only a little more than half of applicants were graduate students/residents or 1st-year post-docs at time of application – this was the intended applicant pool

Analysis of whether EIA is providing early independence

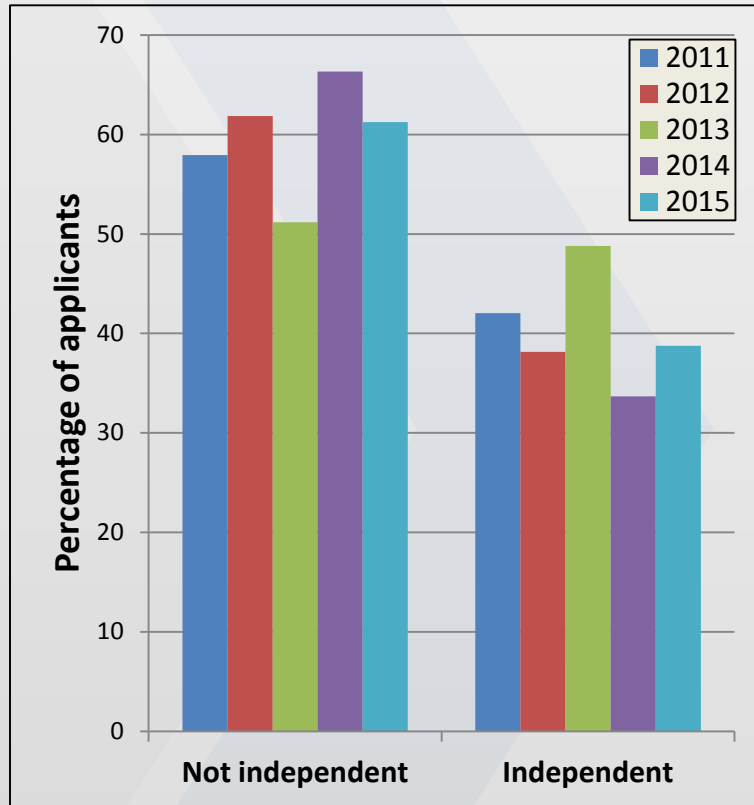
Independence status of awardees
at time of application



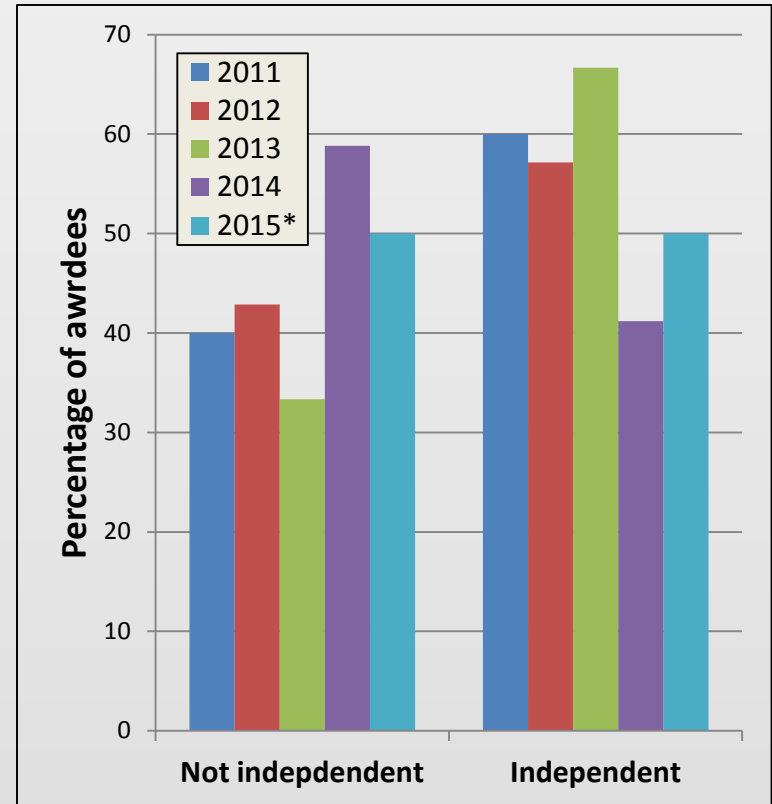
*likely awards for 2015

Analysis of whether EIA is providing early independence

Independence status of **applicants**
at time of application



Independence status of **awardees**
at time of application



- A significant percentage of applicants are already independent
- The review process enriches the percentage of independent candidates

Recommendations: Change eligibility criteria

- At time of application, the recipient must not yet have assumed an independent position (functionally defined)
- This will narrow eligible applicants to the originally intended pool
- Institution must describe explicitly the position that will be provided if award is made and what position, if any, will be available if award is not made. They must describe how the award will foster the independence of the awardee.



Discussion?