

# Update on HRHR Outreach and Anonymized Review Pilot

May 20, 2021



National Institutes of Health  
*Office of Strategic Coordination - The Common Fund*

- A Working Group to the Advisory Committee to the Director was tasked with evaluating the HRHR program.
- The Working Group found that the HRHR program is effective, but that the applicant pool does not reflect the full diversity of the workforce.
- The Working Group provided recommendations to improve applicant diversity, including **enhancing outreach** and **piloting anonymized review** – the two topics of this presentation.

## **Began in 2019, planned 2020 efforts largely derailed due to COVID-19**

- Annual Biomedical Research Conference for Minority Students (ABRCMS)
- Society for Advancement of Chicanos/Hispanics and Native Americans in Science (SACNAS)
- Harold Amos Medical Faculty Development Program
- Network of Minority Health Research Investigators (NMRI) Meeting
- AAMC Minority Faculty Program
- Meeting of the American Psychological Society
- OBSSR dissemination
- NIH IDeA Regional Conferences / National Conference
- Targeted emails to F32 & T32 PIs, officials at MSI and IDeA state institutions
- NIH Regional Seminars
- “Open Mike” blog

# Expanding Outreach



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- 2019 efforts did not result in a significant increase in applicant demographics in 2020 applicant pool
- Pandemic disrupted 2020 efforts
- Will continue to reach out to the community and monitor demographics over time
- Additional outreach suggestions welcome

# Anonymized review pilot



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- To help address the issue of perceived bias, implementing the recommendation of piloting anonymized review
- Pilot being performed with the Transformative Research Award initiative
- Unlike the other HRHR initiatives, which are person-focused, the TRA initiative is more project-focused – lends itself to anonymization
- By statute, all standard review criteria, including Investigator and Environment, must be considered, so cannot maintain anonymity for entire review
- Working closely with CSR

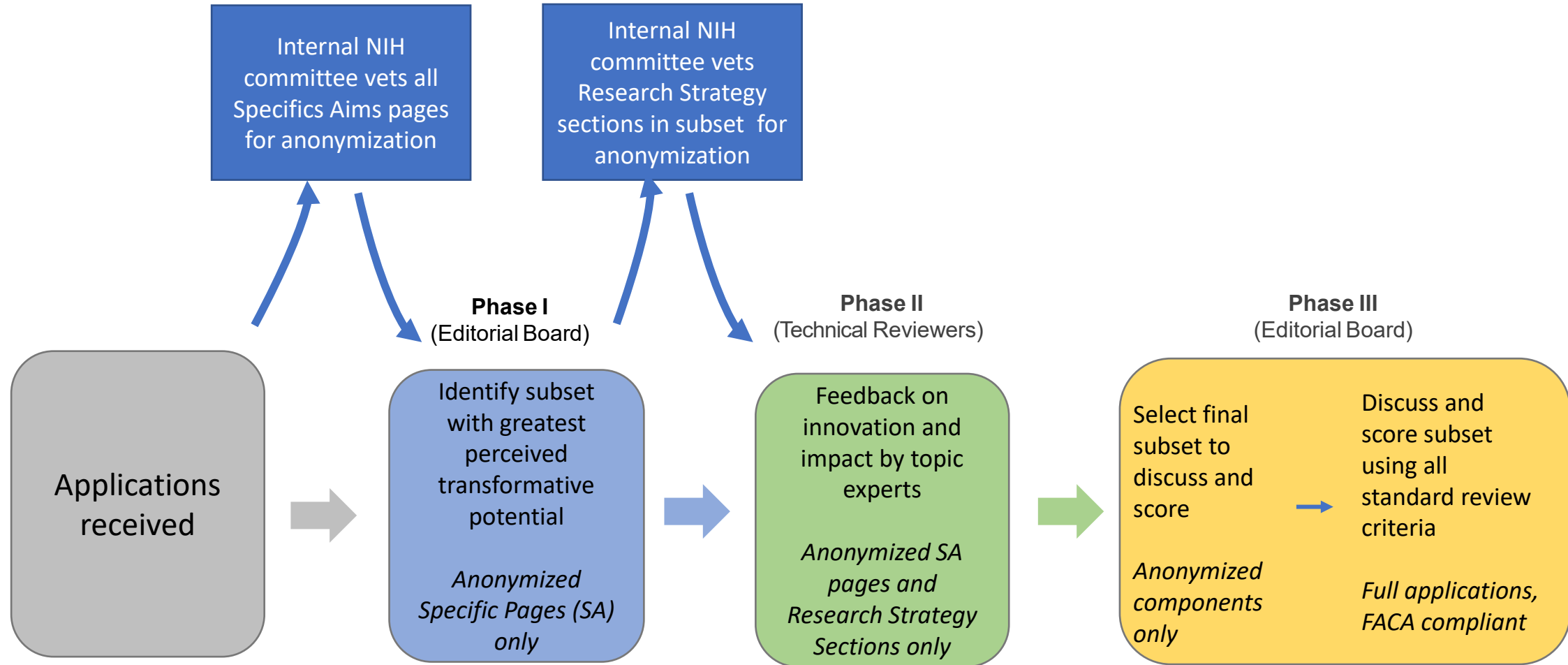
# TRA Anonymized Review Pilot



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- Applicants were instructed in the FOAs on how to anonymize the **Specific Aims pages** and **Research Strategy Sections**.
- All other application components were prepared as before.
- Adapted the pre-existing three-phase review process for TRA applications.
- Editorial Board – 25 scientists with diverse scientific backgrounds who were asked to rely on their broad scientific perspective rather than their topic expertise in assessing applications.
- Technical Reviewers – 244 reviewers selected for having topic expertise in the application(s) they reviewed.

# TRA anonymized review process



# Process evaluation of anonymized review



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- Contracted with the **Science and Technology Policy Institute (STPI)** to conduct a process evaluation of the anonymized review
- STPI has been evaluating the process as close to “real time” as possible
- Salient preliminary findings are presented (through Phase II)
- Will continue pilot for two more years, will monitor relevant data all three years



# From applicant surveys:



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## **60% response rate**

**Did knowing an anonymized review process would be used have an impact on your decision to apply?**

Of the respondents, **25% said Yes**. Reasons include: supports funding the project not people; may be less biased regarding institution prestige and applicant demographics; avoids “rich getting richer” phenomenon.

**Were the instructions in the FOA adequate for anonymizing the application?**

Of the respondents, **82% said Yes**. Suggestions to improve include providing additional examples.

Data from Science and Technology Policy Institute (STPI)  
process evaluation - preliminary

# From Editorial Board survey for Phase I



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## **44% response rate**

### **Was anonymity maintained?**

**Yes**, 0% of the respondents indicated they were able to identify and participating individual or institution.

### **Was the information provided in the anonymized Specific Aims page sufficient to address transformative potential?**

**Somewhat**, 42% said they could not assess *some* applications because they had access only to the Specific Aims page.

**Yes**, 92% said they were “somewhat” or “very confident” about their assessments.

Data from Science and Technology Policy Institute (STPI)  
process evaluation - preliminary

# From Technical Reviewer survey (Phase II)



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**67% response rate**

## **Was anonymity maintained?**

**Mostly yes, 81% of the respondents** stated they could not identify individual or institution. Of those that felt they could, based on specialized research topic, methodologies, or internet search. Correctness of guesses not confirmed.

## **Were the anonymized Specific Aims page and Research Strategy sufficient to assess transformative potential?**

**Mostly yes, 83%** said they could assess significance and innovation and whether approach was logical and compelling.

**64%** said they were able to assess feasibility. (For TRAs, no preliminary data or detailed experimental plan are required.)

Data from Science and Technology Policy Institute (STPI)  
process evaluation - preliminary

## Comparison of 2021 applicants to 2010 – 2020 TRA years

- Demographic diversity increased in FY2021 compared to previous years

Gender: statistically significant lower proportion of male applicants

Race: statistically significant higher proportion of Black/African American applicants

Ethnicity: statistically higher proportion of Hispanic/Latino applicants

- Institutional diversity did not increase as measured by the number of “new” applicant institutions. (However, the representation of IDeA state institutions and underserved institutions did increase.)
- Overall, the trend is encouraging

Data from Science and Technology Policy Institute (STPI)  
process evaluation - preliminary

# Acknowledgements



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Hope Cummings

## Science and Technology Policy Institute evaluation team:

Sally Tinkle (lead)  
Xueying (Shirley) Han  
Luke Newell  
Emma Thrift

## Common Fund HRHR Working Group/TRA Project Team

## Internal NIH team for evaluating responsiveness to anonymization instructions

Arguello, Alexander (NIMH)	Freund, Michelle (NIDA)	Nuckolls, Glen (NINDS)
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(\* indicates Common Fund HRHR WG member)

# Next steps



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- We will continue our outreach efforts and monitor impact
- TRA anonymized review process seems to be working reasonably well – we will refine FOA instructions, but no major changes anticipated
- STPI expects to complete process evaluation in August (We will post online)
- We plan to continue pilot for two more years and then assess
- We will keep you updated

Questions, comments, or  
suggestions?