Communicating With Your NCI Program Director: It's a Two-Way Street

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When would you talk with your NCI PD?

Investigator Initiates Research Idea

Inst. Submits Application to NIH

Center for Scientific Review

Assign to SS

Assign to Institute

Study Section: Scientific Review Officer

Review for

Scientific Merit

Institute: Program Director

Programmatic

Evaluation

Advisory Councils and Boards

2nd Level Review

Recommendations

Institute Director

Approves Funding

Grants Management Specialist

Allocates Funds to Inst.

Conducts Research

Why would you talk with your NCI PD?

- We have three distinct, but related, roles – tapping into your NCI PD's expertise in each of these roles can help you strengthen your project and your science.
  - **The Service Thing**: We try to be of service to the PI, to help the PI optimize his/her application, so that reviewers can judge the best version of each project, and we can then fund the best science.
  - **The Stewardship Thing**: We work to ensure that the nation's investment in NCI is well-spent, in a legal and ethical manner.
  - **The Vision Thing**: We strive to keep current and be forward-looking about the big picture in our field, so that we can help NIH leadership and PIs make decisions about how best to advance cancer research.
- SROs, PDs, and GMSs have a different balance of these three roles.
- Different PDs have a different balance of these three roles.

Pre-Award Phase …

- How we interact with you and your application --
  - Early discussions about: your general idea for an application, whether it is the "proper size", what is a proper funding mechanism, whether to apply soon or wait for more progress, which study section to request, whether it is right for NCI, what our budget rules are, whether to submit it as a Multi-PI application, etc.
  - Listen to study section reviews and provide you with feedback on summary statements and potential next submission options
  - Advocate for your application if there is discretionary funding available
  - Help you resolve any pre-award issues with scientific overlap, budget concerns, human/animal subjects and other reviewer concerns, foreign applications/components, etc., so that your application can be awarded
  - Work with Grants Management Specialists on administering grants: both the PD and the GMS must hit the "GO" button to award a grant

Post Award Phase …

- How we interact with you and your grant --
  - Monitor progress of your research grant by keeping an eye out for your papers, touching base with you at scientific meetings and workshops, etc.
  - Review, evaluate, and approve your annual progress reports
  - Monitor compliance of regulations, policies, special terms of the award
  - Help you identify gaps/needs/opportunities and solve problems in your project throughout your grant life-cycle
  - Serve as a contact point for information about additional sources of funding and resources for your project and your lab
  - Report your major advances to DCB colleagues and NCI/NIH leadership

But It's a Two-Way Street …

- PI communication responsibilities include –
  - Ensure that the "Personal Profile" section of eRA Commons is correct and current: your name, degrees, institution, department, academic rank, address, phone number, email, etc.
  - Monitor the status updates on your applications and grants as they move through the system, via the "Status" section of eRA Commons
    - Documents received/accepted, study section assignment, study section Scientific Review Officer, NIH referral assignment, NIH Program Director, Score, Summary Statement, Just-in-Time requests, Notice of Award, etc.
  - Submit required materials on time: Just-in-Time info, Progress Report, all required certifications and documentation (IACUC, IRB, training certification, data sharing, resource sharing, genomic data sharing, grant close-out reports, etc.)
  - Report your major advances and papers to your NCI Program Director – no need to wait for your next Progress Report (optional, but easy)

A Typical Progress Report (RPPR)…

- Annual progress reports are required to document grantee accomplishments and compliance with the terms of the award
  - About 2-4 pages
  - List and follow order of Specific Aims
  - Discuss successes, problems/failures
  - Include figures, if appropriate
  - Discuss plans for the next year
  - Include Supplement Progress Report if you have a Supplement
  - List Publications, and enter them into the NIH Public Access Policy system
  - Include any other assurances/certifications required for your award
  - Use your colleagues for advice on the science part, and your Sponsored Research Office for guidance on the administrative parts
  - Takes the PI a day or two to prepare - not an hour and not a week

An Atypical Progress Report (RPPR)…

“Too much” data/progress

- Is this really just one year’s progress? Does it distinguish between prior years’ progress and the most recent year’s progress?
- Is the progress from just this grant? Is some of the data from other funding to PI’s lab, which may synergize with this project?

“Too little” data/progress

- Is this is really an accurate account of PI’s total progress for the grant’s most recent year?
  - If so, is this a recurring issue with this grant and/or PI? discuss the challenges that PI has, and plans to get back on track; discuss possible help the PD can provide, especially for New PIs.
  - If not, then PI needs to revise and provide sufficient information on progress and results.

What your NCI Program Director *can't* do for you…

- Tell you how to do your project
- Give/get you a submission deadline exemption
- Give/get you a submission rules-violation exemption
- Change your study section assignment
- Change the NCI funding range
- Change the NCI funding policy
- Change the requirements that must be fulfilled for an NoA to be issued
- Write you a letter of recommendation as your PD
- Talk to your Chairman, or *anyone* outside of NIH except you, about your application, your Summary Statement, or your job/position status

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