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The Academic Career Excellence (ACE) Award (K32) PAR-27-062

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Center for Cancer Training



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Outline

- Purpose of the Award
- Key Features
- Eligibility – Who May Apply
- Benefits
- Important Application Sections
- Tips for a Competitive Application

Goal of the Career Development (K) Awards at NIH

- **Provides mentored support:** to institutions interested in providing biomedical training opportunities for scholars interested in careers in basic, clinical and prevention research important to the NIH
- **Provides protected time and research Independence:** Facilitates the development of postdoctoral scholars with the potential to become productive, independent investigators in research fields relevant to the mission of the participating NIH Institutes and Centers.

K32 Notice of Funding Opportunity (NOFO)

Academic Career Excellence (ACE) Award
(K32 Independent Clinical Trial Not Allowed)

PAR-27-062



Scan for PAR-27-062

Purpose of the ACE K32 Award

- Supports rigorous mentored scientific and career development for early-stage postdoctoral scholars
- Fosters early goal-directed planning and encourage innovative applications with the potential for significant impact on scientific research and career development
 - Supports promising postdoctoral scholars early on
 - Engages and retains these scholars in the cancer research community
 - Facilitates scholars joining/remaining in top laboratories in the cancer field
 - Positions K32 postdoctoral scholars for other NIH awards

Key Features of the K32 Award at NCI

- **Rigorous Mentored Training:** Supports rigorous mentored scientific and career development training for early-stage postdoctoral scholars for up to 3 years (including resubmissions)
- **No Preliminary Data Needed:** Emphasizes innovation and tailored plans for training and mentorship as preliminary data are not required
- **Protected Time:** Provides early protected time to build preliminary data to successfully compete for other NIH K awards
- **Supports and Retains Early Career Scholars:** Specifically designed for late-stage graduate students and/or early-stage postdocs conducting cancer-focused research

K32 Award Eligibility

- Candidates may submit K32 applications
 - Up to 1 year prior to beginning their postdoctoral position
 - Application must be submitted from the postdoctoral institution
 - No more than 2 years after the post-graduate/postdoctoral training begins (resubmissions included)
 - U.S. citizenship or permanent U.S. residency status IS NOT REQUIRED to submit a K32 application
 - U.S. citizenship or permanent U.S. residency status IS REQUIRED to receive a K32 award

K32 Award Eligibility Extensions

- Childbirth:
 - Mothers – 1 year Extension
 - Fathers – Case-by-case basis
- Gaps in education
- Armed forces service
- Medical issues
 - Verify extension request with program director
 - Include the verified extension in your SciENcv/Biosketch

K32 Award Non-Eligibility

- The following candidates would not be eligible for a K32 award:
 - Candidate is already a current PD/PI on any of the following awards:
 - NIH Research project grants
 - NIH Program projects
 - NIH Center grants
 - Individual NIH career development awards (Ks)
 - Candidate proposes to undertake postdoctoral training at:
 - Non-domestic (non-U.S.) institution
 - Non-domestic (non-U.S.) component of U.S. Organization

Before Considering an NCI K32 Application

- Identify a postdoctoral mentor at a domestic U.S. institution
- Work closely with your postdoctoral mentor and formulate an original cancer-focused research project and tailored career development plan
 - Mentor(s) should have relevant expertise in the proposed biomedical, behavioral or clinical cancer-focused research project leading to research independence and significant experience mentoring postdoctoral fellows
 - Mentor(s) is expected to help the candidate develop an innovative, comprehensive cancer-focused research and career development plan prior to or shortly after starting with the postdoctoral mentor

K32 Award Benefits

- Salary
 - May request up to \$80,000 + fringe benefits per year
 - Must be consistent with both the established salary at the institution and with salaries provided by the institution to other scholars with equivalent qualifications, rank and responsibilities in the department concerned
 - Candidate may obtain additional salary for effort associated with other federal sources provided the total salary derived from all Federal sources does not exceed the maximum legislated salary rate and the total percent effort does not exceed 100%

K32 Award Benefits (Continued)

- Research Support
 - Up to \$30,000 toward research development costs
 - Tuition and fees for course work and career development
 - Research-related expenses
 - Supplies, equipment, technical personnel
 - Travel to research meetings or training
 - Statistical services
 - Personnel and computer time
 - At least 75% effort required
- Indirect Costs
 - Facilities and Administrative (F&A): 8% of Direct Costs
- Duration
 - Up to 3 years of support

K32 Application Preparation

- Start *early* (~6 months)
- Allow your self enough time
- Contact NCI the program director *early* if you have questions
- Consult with and involve your mentor(s)

Preparing to Write a K32 Application: Initial Steps

- Step 1: Read the NOFO, SF(424) K award instructions, and access information at NIH Grants.Gov website (<http://www.grants.gov>)
- Step 2: Note the review criteria
- Step 3: Draft specific aims
- Step 4: Consider and request strong reference letters (3-5)
- Step 5: Contact the program director *early* if needed
 - Email is most efficient; for eligibility questions include
 - SciENCv/CV/NIH biosketch
 - Draft of specific aims
 - Specific questions

K32 Application Information

- K32 award emphasizes innovative research ideas and thoughtful plans for training and mentorship
- Research proposal CANNOT involve leading an independent clinical trial, a clinical trial feasibility study or an ancillary clinical trial
- Research proposal CAN propose a research experience in a clinical trial led by a mentor or co-mentor
- Preliminary data may be included, but are not required
- If preliminary data are included, data will be reviewed

Application Sections and Page Limits

Application Sections	Page Limits
Candidate	12
Candidate's Background	
Career Goals, Preparedness and Potential	
Candidate's Plan for Career Development/Training Activities	
Research Plan	
Specific Aims	1
Training in the Responsible Conduct of Research	1
Mentor, Co-Mentor, Consultant, Collaborators Plans and Statements of Mentor and Co-mentor(s)	6
Letters of Support from Collaborators, Contributors, etc.	6
Description of Institutional Environment	1
Institutional Commitment	1
SciENcv	5

Specific Aims

- May be the first page read by reviewers
- 1 page in length
- Should be:
 - Well-defined
 - Hypothesis-driven
 - Cancer-focused (NCI)
 - Not all descriptive or exploratory
 - Not interdependent
- A lot of thought should be put into specific aims

Scored Application Sections

- Candidate (and SciENCv)
 - Career Goals, Preparedness and Potential
 - Career Development/Training Activities Plan
- Research Plan
- Mentor, Co-Mentor, Consultants and Collaborators
- Environment and Institutional Commitment to the Candidate

Candidate Section

Candidate's Background

- Previous experiences – Preparation for proposed research training plan
- Qualities that will improve likelihood of a successful research training outcome
 - Scientific understanding
 - Creativity
 - Curiosity
 - Resourcefulness
 - Drive
- Potential to benefit from research training plan (e.g., high impact training)
- Potential to transition to next career stage and/or research independence

Candidate Section

Career Goals, Preparedness and Potential

- Career goals and objectives
 - Prior experience
 - Current research support
 - Timeline is encouraged
- Potential for independence
- Demonstrate you have received/will receive training in relevant courses, for example:
 - Data management
 - Study design (including statistics)
 - Hypothesis development
 - Training specific to the proposed research area, for example
 - Drug development
 - Epidemiology
 - Human subjects and vertebrate animals

Candidate Section

Career Development/Training Activities Plan

- Career development plan
 - Clear goals tailored to the specific needs of the candidate
 - Timeline is encouraged
- Design of didactic courses/classes and research
 - How this will develop necessary knowledge and skills
- Professional responsibilities/activities beyond annual 9 Person Months (75% full-time effort)
- Professional responsibilities/activities to prepare for independence. For example, for aspiring academic PIs, plans could consider formal training in grant writing, mentoring and leadership.
- Relationship of research plan to career development plan

Research Plan Section

- Sound research plan
 - Customized to specific needs of candidate
 - Timeline is encouraged
- Relationship of mentor's research and candidate's preposed research
 - How this will develop necessary knowledge and skills
- Rigor and feasibility of research strategy
- Overall goals of research plan and how goals will be attained
- Identify areas of needed research development and realistic activities to address
- Expected results, potential pitfalls and alternative approaches
 - Propose viable path for continuing if key component does not go as planned
- Write so generalists will understand (e.g., not all are experts in the field)

Mentor, Co-Mentor, Consultant, Collaborators Section

Plans and Statements of Mentor and Co-Mentor(s)

- Name a primary mentor
 - Should have expertise in proposed research project and experience in mentoring postdoctoral scholars onto independence
 - Should have sufficient independent research support for excess costs
 - Identify source of funds and documentation
 - Timeline for proposed training program is encouraged
- Include in the mentor's statement
 - Mentor's research qualifications and supervisory experience
 - Plan describing nature of supervision and mentoring during award period
 - Plan for career progression
 - Plan for monitoring candidate's research, publications and independence
 - Plan for candidate to take all/parts of research project after completion of training with the mentor
- Name a co-mentor(s) if necessary and coordinate with primary mentor

Mentor, Co-Mentor, Consultant, Collaborators Section

Letters of Support from Collaborators and Consultants

- Signed statements for all collaborators and consultants required
 - Confirm participation in project
 - Describe specific roles
 - Provide information about the expertise being provided
- Advisory Committee Members (if applicable)
 - Describe research expertise being sought
 - Do NOT name specific members
 - Names to be submitted as Just-In-Time (JIT) at awarding time
 - Members may be established faculty at candidate's institution or elsewhere
 - Members should be chosen for their expertise in candidate's proposed research

Environment and Institutional Commitment to Candidate

- Description of Institutional Environment
 - Sponsoring institution must document a strong well-established research and career development program related to candidate's research
 - High-quality research environment
 - Key faculty and other investigators capable of collaboration with the candidate
 - Describe how institutional research environment is well-suited for candidate's research career development and proposed research plan

Environment and Institutional Commitment to Candidate

- Institution Commitment to Candidate' Research and Career Development
 - Provide a statement of commitment to the candidate's development into a productive independent investigator and to meeting award requirements
 - Commitment cannot be contingent on receipt of award
 - Funds must be made available if needed beyond the award and mentor
 - Provide assurance
 - About candidate's required effort
 - Candidate will have access to laboratory and office space, equipment and other resources and facilities to perform research
 - Appropriate time and support will be available for any mentor or other staff for career development

Tips: What Makes a Successful K32 Application?

How to Set Yourself Apart

- Candidate: Scientific understanding; potential; creativity; curiosity; resourcefulness
- Career Development Plan: Customized; potential for growth; benchmarks; timeline
- Specific Aims: Well-defined; hypothesis-driven; cancer-focused; mechanistic
- Research Plan: Innovative; significant; cancer-focused; timeline
- Preliminary Data: Optional. If provided: solid; rigorous; convincing
- Research Plan: Logical; well-written; feasible; pitfalls and alternatives
- Mentor(s): Strong mentoring and funding records; highly qualified
- Collaborator(s) and Consultant(s): Letters of support, SciENCvs
- Institutional Commitment: Resources; facilities; help to achieve independence
- Justification: Need for protected time
- Reference Letters: Outstanding; customized; 3-5 allowed

K32 Application Due Dates

- New Applications
 - October 12, 2026
 - February 12, 2027
 - June 12, 2027 (Final Due Date)
- Resubmissions
 - March 12, 2027
 - July 12, 2027 (Final Due Date)
- **Beginning October 2027**
 - Candidates will need to consider new NIH K NOFOs
 - Guide Notice: NOT-OD-26-098

New NCI Policy: Vertebrate Animals

- Beginning in October 2026:
 - Applicants proposing use of vertebrate animal models
 - Will need to include additional information in 1-page Abstract
 - Scientific rationale for animal model use
 - Plan for validating findings in human-based model(s)
- See <https://www.cancer.gov/grants-training/nci-bottom-line-blog/2026/guidance-animal-models>
- All within the 30 lines of text limit for Abstract

Tips for Mentors

- Identify co-mentor(s) if needed
- Co-mentor(s) should have a clearly defined role
- Develop a customized training plan/career development plan
- Be actively involved in the K32 application preparation process
- Grantsmanship issues = poor mentoring
- Avoid scientific overlap and no text duplication from research project grant
- Provide a clear statement that the candidate may take the project

Common Mistakes

- Specific aims: Underdeveloped and/or interdependent; not thought through
- Too focused or too broad
- Lack of feasibility
- Preliminary data not convincing, rigorous *if provided*
- Over-ambitious or under-ambitious
- Granstmanship errors

Take Home Lessons

- Read the K32 funding opportunity announcement carefully
- Understand what you should provide and how you will be reviewed
- Plan ahead. Contact the Program Director *early* if needed
- Write the research proposal so that generalists will understand and appreciate
- Justify why you need the award
- Build your team wisely – mentor(s) & collaborator(s)
- Don't lose sight of the big picture – why you love science and your goal to become an independent cancer researcher

NCI Contacts for K32 Questions/Answers

Before Application Submission

Program Director

Hana Odeh, PhD

Sonia Jakowlew, PhD

NCIK32@nih.gov

After Application Submission

Scientific Review Official

Assigned by Center for Scientific Review (CSR)

NCI CCT K32 Webpage

<https://www.cancer.gov/grants-training/training/funding/k32>

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NCI F31 Award

NCI F32 Award

NCI F99/K00 Award

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NCI K08 Award

NCI Calabresi K12 Award

NCI McCaskill-Stevens K12 Award

NCI K22 Award

NCI K25 Award

NCI K32 Award

NCI K99 Award

NCI Early K99 Award

Academic Career Excellence (ACE) Award (K32)

The **Academic Career Excellence (ACE) Award (K32)** supports early-stage postdoctoral scholars for training in cancer research expanding the candidate's scientific research and career development experience from their predoctoral training.

NOTE: *The details on this page are for informational purposes only. Please read and follow all requirements and instructions in the notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) before applying for an award. Application review information is described in the NOFO. If you have questions before submitting your application, please contact the relevant NCI program staff listed at the end of this page.*

For more complete information, reference the funding opportunity [PA-27-062 \(K32 Independent Clinical Trial Not Allowed\)](#), and/or contact the program staff.

On This Page

- [General Award Information](#)
- [Applicant Eligibility](#)
- [Budget](#)
- [How to Apply](#)
- [Resources](#)
- [NCI Staff Contacts](#)



Scan for K32 webpage



Other NIH Institutes Offering K32 Awards

- National Institute of Allergy and Infectious Disease (NIAID)
aitrainingHelpDesk@niaid.nih.gov
- National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering (NIBIB)
nibibawards@mail.nih.gov
- National Institute of Dental and Craniofacial Research (NIDCR)
nidcrtraining@nidcr.nih.gov
- National Institute of Neurological Disorders and Stroke (NINDS)
nindskawards@ninds.nih.gov

Thank you for your attention

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