

An Overview of the NCI T32 Program

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Report: Channing J. Der
Subcommittee: everyone there

Goals of session

- To provide PIs and students information about the training goals, requirements, key statistics, and review criteria for T32 grants.
- To give insight into how current or prospective T32 directors can get a new or renewal T32 application funded

So, there is good news and there
is bad news

The bad news: the 3:1 postdoctoral:predoctoral trainee ratio is here to stay (for now)

- Rationale for 25% predoctoral level - based on the conclusions and recommendations of an external advisory committee of **academic researchers** 10 years ago – based on the perception that postdocs are more likely to stay in cancer research versus predocs
- Reevaluated recently, NCI feels that this trend still holds. So, to address concerns of CABTRAC and others, the NCI now has now added F30s and F31s (separate from minority-focused F31s)
- Existing programs can retain predoctoral numbers, can increase only postdoctoral fellow numbers

The good news: T32 funding level remains among the best of all NCI funding mechanisms

- While R01 funding has dropped, T32 funding has remained excellent. Number of applications: 70 per year, awarding 30-40 per year type 1 (new) and 2 (renewal) – success rate ~50%
- Last 5 years - new applications, 30% funded; competitive renewals, 60% funded
- Two chances to submit: new applications, most funded on A1 resubmission, whereas competitive renewals, higher % funded on first submission – study sections favor “proven” T32s

Different way of thinking?

- NCI – assessing programs based on how best to facilitate pipeline of trainees into cancer biology-focused independent investigators
- T32 directors – finding support for best available talent; for many institutions, predoctoral pool is superior and deeper than the postdoctoral pool
- NCI – with dwindling R01 support, how wise is it to continue to support the flow of predoctoral students into the pipeline?

T32 applications: new and renewals

Key message: NCI has institute-specific requirements and deadlines; look at website, talk with NCI

Training program and environment

- Cancer research focus
- Cohesiveness of program
- Uniqueness and overlap with other programs at your institution
- Environment – “a gimme”, usually an easy issue for most applications

Training program director

- Should be active cancer researcher and should have R01 or R01-like funding (e.g., DOD funding counts)
- Can overcome weakness in research strength with multi-PD, where one is more administrative, the other is strong in research
- Biosketches of program director(s) really need personal statements that address training and mentoring experience, customized for T32 – reviewers read these very carefully
- Statements for preceptors recommended but not required

Preceptors/mentors

- Generally, a strong mentoring track record is important for preceptors
- However, it is okay and encouraged to have junior faculty
- Good to have range of experience in mentorship, and for longevity; want to see a pool of junior mentors for the future – can link with co-mentors
- Describe an evaluation process for the selection of mentors, and future of mentors
- A good distribution of trainees with mentors

Trainees

- Data/evidence that pool is highly selective
- Mechanism for looking outside the institution, good recruitment strategies
- Justify number of training positions requested, especially if requesting an increase in number of trainees

Training record

- Most important aspect of whole application for renewal
- Want to see retention in program for the usual 2 years, that they publish in top journals, stay in academics
- Longer term, want to see continued retention in cancer research, with trainee productivity and advancement in professional ladder
- Feedback from trainees – how will this be achieved?
- Tables need to be clear, and content should be consistent from table to table

Training record (continued)

- Definitions of “success” (academia v. science editor) and “retention” (postdoc, job) remain fuzzy – the NCI’s assessment on trainees career development and accomplishment in cancer research tracks parameters including publications and subsequent funding. While these parameters primarily track the careers’ of independent investigators, it reflects the fact that these are the parameters where usable data can be collected. So, it is not purposely using independent investigator as the only meaningful outcome measurement

Diversity recruitment and retention plan

- Mostly unscored component; show that the plan is unique to the training program; make it easy for reviewers, use subheadings
- One component is scored: the prior success rate of minority recruitment

Training in responsible conduct of research

- Needs to be face-to-face, not just online
- List course titles (subject matter), names of training faculty, duration (8 hrs is required)
- Frequency of at least once every 4 years
- Must include information on how trainee participation will be monitored

Questions?

Ask Lynn Amende or Ming Lei
(one of the great features of the
CABTRAC retreat*)

*Also snagging external advisors for your T32