

CHAPTER 3

HOW TO FIND THE APPROPRIATE PROGRAM AND GRANT MECHANISM FOR YOUR IDEA

HOW TO FIND THE APPROPRIATE PROGRAM FOR YOUR APPLICATION

TIP: Review panels don't fund grant applications! Review panels recommend funding.

Program officials make the funding decisions.

One of the most important misconceptions held by applicants is that review panels fund grant applications. A second common misconception is that program officials are not relevant to the development of grant applications. In fact, nothing could be farther from the truth! While standing review panels (called Scientific Review Groups or Study Sections at NIH) are critically important in evaluating the scientific and technical merit of proposals (i.e., they recommend funding), the person who has the most input into whether an application will be funded, or not, is the Program Officer who is in charge of the specific program being targeted.

It is also not widely appreciated by applicants that each of NIH's programs has its own set of programmatic priorities. Such priorities are set according to current mission goals. To assist in setting priorities, program officials periodically inventory their portfolios of already-funded grants. The purpose is to determine how their funds are distributed. If a given research area is well or overly represented, Program may decide to de-emphasize that area when future funding decisions are made. Mission-relevant research areas that are not adequately represented, along with new programmatic goals, may be given future funding priority. Therefore, to be maximally appealing to Program, your idea should fall within an area of current programmatic relevance.

TIP: What you want to propose is not necessarily what is important. Finding an NIH program that wants to fund what you want to propose is the key to success!

In light of the above, *a critical step in developing a competitive grant application is assuring that your idea will be regarded by the Program Officer as programmatically relevant when it is submitted.* Ideally, you want to "marry" what you want to do with what a program wants done, so that by funding your proposal the program will take a step toward accomplishing its mission. It is important at this early stage in the development of your application, therefore, to identify the program at NIH that will be the target of your application.

As was noted in Chapter 1, NIH is organized under the Director's Office into 20 Institutes, the National Library of Medicine, and 6 Centers. Each of these entities has its own set of priorities and provides research grant support as a means of accomplishing its goals. If you will be sub-