Preparing a competitive F31 Application
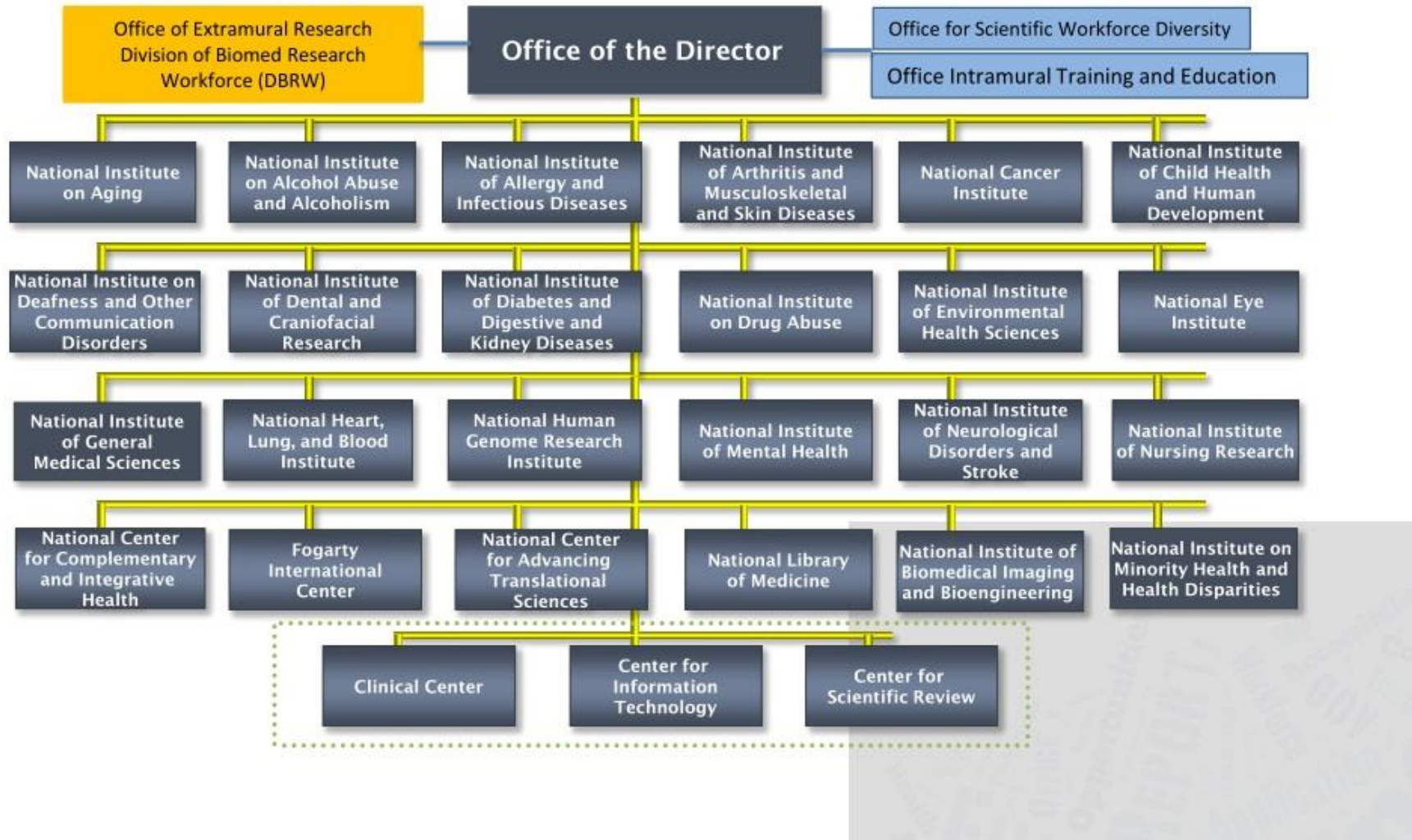
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Outline

- So… what is an F31

- NIH Scoring System 101

- Picking the right study section (find your match)

- Preparing you F31 application (start early!)

- Examples from applications

So... what is an F31

- It is a fellowship for doctoral students (different from T32)
  - There are also awards for postdocs (F32, K99/R00)

- **Eligibility:** Doctoral student (**U.S. citizens or permanent residents)**
  - Research lab selected
- **Maximum Award Duration:** 5 years
- **Yearly Due Dates:** April 8, August 8, December 8
  - Due earlier to TAMU SRS (QA/QC)
- **Award Budget:** Annual Stipend, insurance + Tuition/fees
  - Applications may request the NRSA childcare allowance

NIH includes 27 Institutes and Centers

Finding the right program announcement

➢ Start with [NIH parent awards](), but also look at institute specific awards
  ➢[NIA F31 awards]()

➢Eligibility F31-Diversity

   A. Individuals from racial and ethnic groups that have been shown to be underrepresented in health-related sciences on a national basis

   B. Individuals with disabilities, as described in the Americans with Disabilities Act

   C. Individuals from disadvantaged backgrounds, defined as those who meet _two or more_ of the prescribed criteria

Note: Program contacts listed at bottom on announcement

NIH Scoring System 101

- Applications assigned to three reviewers
  - Will independently evaluate application and assign score ([written critique](#))
  - Five categories (and overall merit)
  - 1) Fellowship applicant
  - 2) Sponsors, collaborators, and consultants
  - 3) Research training plan
  - 4) Training potential
  - 5) Institutional environment and commitment to training
- Review time… all applications scored only top half discussed (~15 minutes)

Impact	Score	Descriptor	Strengths/Weaknesses
High Impact	1	Exceptional	Strengths
	2	Outstanding	
	3	Excellent	
Moderate Impact	4	Very Good	
	5	Good	
	6	Satisfactory	
Low Impact	7	Fair	
	8	Marginal	
	9	Poor	Weaknesses

Picking the right study section (find your match)

- Center for Scientific Review – [Fellowship study sections](#)
  - Ask your program officer (PO)
  - List in cover letter
- Examples of different styles ...
  - Endocrinology, metabolism, nutrition and reproductive sciences (SEP)
  - Infectious diseases and immunology (Panel A)

Sponsors, co-sponsors, collaborators, and consultants

- Your training team (Sponsor and co-sponsor)
  - Active investigators in the area of the proposed research training with commitment to your research training.
  - Active funding ($$) and history of successful mentoring
- Collaborators may provide useful training or mentoring
- Consultants may also provide highly unique skill associated with project
- The Sponsor, Co-Sponsor, Collaborators must complete a Biographical Sketch
  - Personal Statement
  - Contribution to Science
  - Research Support
  - Track Record of Mentoring
- Collaborators and consultants should attach letters of support

Preparing you F31 application (start early!)

- 1) Applicant's background & fellowship goals
- 2) Research training plan
- 3) Information on sponsors and collaborators
- 4) Institutional environment and commitment to training
- LOTS of additional documents
  - Project summary/abstract (30 lines of text) *See NIH Reporter
  - Project narrative (3 sentences)
  - Training in the responsible conduct of research
  - Resource sharing plans
  - Authentication of key biological and/or chemical resources
  - Protection for human subjects? Vertebrate animals? Biohazards?

https://grants.nih.gov/grants/how-to-apply-application-guide/format-and-write/page-limits.htm

1) Background on the fellowship applicant

- Mainly evaluated through the <u>Applicant's Background and Goals for Fellowship Training</u> (6 pgs.)
  - Research experience (undergraduate, MS, PhD rotation projects)
  - Training goals and objectives (career goal)
  - Specific activities planned
- Also, through the candidate biosketch
  - Personal statement
  - Positions and honors
  - Contribution to science (presentations, publications, etc. outreach)
  - Scholastic performance
- Reference letters
  - A minimum of three (3) and a maximum of (5) must be submitted. Your sponsor/co-sponsor may not be one

Arial 11 font, 0.5" margins on all sides

2) Research training plan

- Start with <u>specific aims</u> (1 pg.)
  - Open with problem (critical gap)
  - Long-term goal
  - Central hypothesis (based on rationale)
  - Aims (2): hypothesis within each aim and strategy
  - Expected outcome
- Expand in your <u>Research strategy</u> (6 pgs.)
  - Significance (Why does it matter?)
  - Innovation (What is novel? Methods? Concept?)
  - Approach
    - Each aim: Rational, preliminary data, experimental strategy, anticipated outcomes and Alternative Approaches
  - Timeline

3) Information on sponsors and collaborators

- Respective contributions (1 pg.)
- Selection of sponsor and institution (1 pg.)
- Sponsor and co-sponsor statements (6 pgs.)
- Letters of support from collaborators and consultants (6 pgs.)

4) Institutional environment and commitment to training

- Description of Institutional Environment (2 pgs.)
  - Institution, department basics
  - Educational environment
  - Resources for Proposed Research
  - Resources for Career Development
  - Proposed Development Plan
- Facilities & other resources
- Equipment
- Training in the responsible conduct of research (1 pg.)

Examples

- https://www.niaid.nih.gov/grants-contracts/three-new-f31-sample-applications

Good luck!