NIH Institute and Center Funding Priorities

Each NIH administering Institute and Center (IC) has its own research agenda, driven by its focus on specific diseases, conditions, body systems, public health needs, scientific opportunities or other strategic goals. To meet this agenda, ICs set priorities for research funding, taking into consideration their five-year strategic plan, their existing research portfolio, extant and emerging public health needs, plans of other ICs, and other factors. ICs typically split their extramural research budgets by institute-initiated projects (such as those conducted by cooperative groups, networks, or centers or those conducted in response to an RFA) and investigator-initiated projects, which are largely made up of R01 grants that are submitted in response to NIH’s ‘parent announcement.’ Some IC’s spend the majority of the extramural funds on institute-initiated projects, while others spend the majority on investigator-initiated projects.

To guide decisions on which investigator-initiated R01 grants to fund, many ICs utilize a payline, which is a percentile-based funding cutoff point determined by balancing the projected number of applications coming to an IC with the amount of funds available. Some ICs utilize more than one payline when making funding decisions (e.g. New Investigator paylines for R01s). Applications outside the payline can be paid under justified circumstances, referred to as “select pay”, if these applications are a high priority for the IC; for example, several ICs choose to fund Early Stage Investigator applications that fare well in peer review but are not within the official payline. Some applications that are scored within the payline, including those that receive scores of 5 percentage points or below, may not be selected for funding. Reasons for these funding decisions include:

- A P01 was awarded that encompassed the project
- Another version of the award was funded or there was overlap with another awarded project
- The project was determined to be low priority/there was sufficient program balance in that area

The Funding Priorities histograms show the number of investigator-initiated R01/R37 grants that were awarded or not awarded based on peer-review percentile scores. The regions of overlap between the awarded and not awarded applications provide some insight regarding IC use of select pay in making funding decisions.

It is important to note that the histograms represent only investigator-initiated awards and only those proposals that were reviewed by a study section.

Full report is available on the Other Special Reports page. Click link to display report.