Submitting My First “K” Award
Lessons Learned

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How we’ll spend our time

My journey

What I think I did well

What I wish I did differently

Next steps

Open discussion
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Why I pursued a training grant

• PhD in nursing
• Entered a non-traditional role post PhD
• Successful publication record
  – Lacked the skills and training to do what I wanted to do
Fall 2020: Transitioned to new institution

• Institutional support for training grant
  – Establish leadership commitment
  – Application & award

“Ks are the hardest grants to write.”
Fall 2020: Transitioned to new institution

- Career development award programs
  - Guidance, support, training
  - Protected time

Connecticut Convergence Institute for Translation in Regenerative Engineering
Pre-K Scholar Career Development Award Program

“The Pre-K Scholar Career Development Award Program is a 2-year interactive program designed to equip junior faculty with the knowledge and competencies to effectively apply for an NIH Research Career Development Awards (K award) as well as become leaders in clinical and translational science. The long-term goal is to increase the pipeline of researchers applying for a K award and a culture that supports this goal.”
Finding mentors at a new institution

• How do I find the right mentors and collaborators in a new institution?
• How do I build these relationships in a remote environment?
When looking for mentors

• Mentor’s expertise should advance
  – The proposed research
  – Your training plan
  – Your career goals

• Primary mentors
  – Successful track record of federal grant funding
Finding mentors at a new institution

• Asked for recommendations and follow-up!
  – Sought institutional mechanisms that support research development.
  – Sought opportunities to talk about your research interests.
• Explored institutional faculty pages, research centers, PubMed, NIH Reporter, etc.!
Building relationships with mentors at new institution

• Initial email included
  – NIH biosketch
  – Specific aims page
  – Request to meet remotely

• Continued to engage with mentors
  – Solicited feedback along the way
  – Standing meetings
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What I think I did well.

Started the process **early** with institutional support.
What I think I did well.

- Sought funded awards in the same mechanism to use as a reference and exemplar

https://reporter.nih.gov/advanced-search
Reviewed Success Rates of K Grants

What I think I did well.

- Engaged with the program officer early
- Responded to program officer’s feedback
- Clearly articulated how proposed study aligns with the mission and vision of funding agency
What I think I did well.

• Embraced critiques - welcomed feedback and was responsive to feedback
  – The program officer
  – My mentors
  – Reviewers’ comments from mock review

Major Roadblocks
- Poor feasibility of conducting study in hospital setting
- Study outcomes were not sufficiently patient oriented
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What I wish I did *differently*.

- Worked backwards - Started with my end in mind
  - What are my career goals?
  - How do I get there?

Feedback from mock review was exceptional.

  - Specify *why* you need additional research training.
So many documents!

Kept an itemized list of required documents

- Human Subjects
- Biosketches (new format)
- Clinical trials
- Budget
- Etc. etc.!

Set deadlines for their completion
What I wish I did **differently**.

https://researchtraining.nih.gov/programs/career-development
"Special Note: Not all NIH Institutes and Centers participate in Parent Announcements. Applicants should carefully note which ICs participate in this announcement and view their respective areas of research interest and requirements at the Table of IC-Specific Information, Requirements and Staff Contacts website. ICs that do not participate in this announcement will not consider applications for funding. Consultation with NIH staff before submitting an application is strongly encouraged."
Table of IC-Specific Information, Requirements and Staff Contacts

- Salary support
- Research support
- Scope of work
- Limits to length of the award

Includes very important institute-specific information
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Next Steps

• Excellent critiques
• Spoke with program officer
• Working on resubmission
  • Itemized list of identified weaknesses
  • Thematic grouping
  • One-page response
  • Updated proposal
In Summary: Overarching Takeaways

- Preparing the K took a lot longer than I thought
- Much of the K is a story about you
  - What are your career goals?
  - What past experiences informed your career goals and why?
  - How does the proposed research built upon your previous work and advance your career goals?
  - What is your training plan and how does the plan advance your career goals?
- Senior faculty willingly served as my mentors; engage your mentors to think things through
In Summary: Overarching Takeaways

• My journey - characterized by several important turns
  – Feedback of others
    • Mentors
    • Program Officer
    • Mock review
• Clarified my thinking and resulted in a much stronger product
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Questions?

THANK YOU!

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