REVIEW CRITERIA

Although individual NIH Institutes and Centers may have specialized review criteria, most applications are evaluated using the following criteria:

• Past research training record of both the program and the designated preceptors as determined by the success of former trainees in seeking further career development and in establishing productive scientific careers. Evidence of further career development can include receipt of fellowships, career awards, further training appointments, and similar accomplishments. Evidence of a productive scientific career can include a record of successful competition for research grants, receipt of special honors or awards, a record of publications, receipt of patents, promotion to scientific positions, and any other measure of success consistent with the nature and duration of the training received.

• Objectives, design, and direction of the research training program,

• Caliber of preceptors as researchers, including successful competition for research support in areas directly related to the proposed research training program,

• Quality of the institutional training environment for NRSA supported trainees and the relationship of the NRSA program to the broader training program (if appropriate). The level of institutional commitment, quality of the facilities, availability of appropriate courses, and the availability of research and research training support,

• Quality of the applicant pool and the selection of individuals for appointment to the training program. This assessment will include a consideration of the racial and ethnic diversity of the trainee pool, but will take into account the described recruitment and retention efforts as well as the availability of individuals from underrepresented groups within the relevant pool of applicants,

• Record of the research training program in retaining health-professional postdoctoral trainees for at least 2 years in research training or other research activities,

• When appropriate, the concomitant research training of health-professional postdoctorates (i.e., individuals with the M.D., D.O., D.D.S., etc.) with basic science postdoctorates (i.e., individuals with a Ph.D., etc.) or linkages with basic science departments.

Short-Term Research Training Positions: In addition to the above criteria, applications that request short-term research training positions will also be assessed using the following criteria:

• Quality of the proposed short-term research training program including the commitment and availability of the participating faculty, program design, availability of research support, and training environment,
• Access to candidates for short-term research training and the ability to recruit high quality, short-term trainees from the applicant institution or some other health-professional school,

• Characteristics of the research training program that might be expected to persuade short-term trainees to consider careers in health-related research,

• Success in attracting students back for multiple appointments (competing continuation applications),

• Effect of the short-term training program on the quality of the regular research training program or any existing, stand-alone short-term research training program, including the appropriateness of the number of short-term positions, and the plan to integrate the short-term training program into the regular research training programs,

• Plan to follow the careers of short-term trainees and to assess the effect of the training program on subsequent career choices.

ADDITIONAL REVIEW CONSIDERATIONS

Minority Recruitment and Retention Plan: The NIH remains committed to increasing the participation of individuals from underrepresented minority groups in biomedical and behavioral research. As first announced in 1989, all competing applications for institutional NRSA research training grants must include a specific plan to recruit and retain underrepresented minorities in the training program. In addition, all competing continuation applications must include a report on the recruitment and retention of underrepresented minorities during the previous award period. If an application is received without a plan or without a report on the previous award period, the application will be considered incomplete and will be returned to the applicant without review. Additional information on this requirement was published in the NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts, Volume 22, Number 25, July 16, 1993 (see http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/not93-188.html).

Competing continuation and non-competing applications must include a detailed account of experiences in recruiting individuals from underrepresented groups during the previous funding period. Information must be included on successful and unsuccessful recruitment strategies. The report should provide information on the racial/ethnic distribution of:

• Students or postdoctorates who applied for admission or positions within the department(s) relative to the training grant,

• Students or postdoctorates who were offered admission to or a position within the department(s),

• Students actually enrolled in the academic program relevant to the training grant,
- Students or postdoctorates who were appointed to the research training grant.

For those trainees who were enrolled in the academic program, the report should include information about the duration of research training and whether those trainees finished their training in good standing.

The success of efforts to recruit and retain minority trainees is a factor in the assessment of the quality of the trainee pool and thus will be included within the priority score. In addition, peer reviewers will separately evaluate the minority recruitment plan and report (for competing renewals) after the overall score has been determined. Reviewers will examine the strategies to be used in the recruitment of minorities and whether the experience in recruitment during the previous award period has been incorporated into the formulation of the plan for the next award period. The review panel’s evaluation will be included in an administrative note in the summary statement. If the plan or the record of minority recruitment and retention is judged to be unacceptable, funding will be withheld until a revised plan (and report) that addresses the deficiencies is received. Staff within the NIH awarding component, with guidance from the appropriate national advisory committee or council, will determine whether amended plans and reports submitted after the initial review are acceptable.

Training in the Responsible Conduct of Research: Every predoctoral and postdoctoral NRSA trainee supported by an institutional research training grant must receive instruction in the responsible conduct of research. (For more information on this provision, see the NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts, Volume 21, Number 43, November 27, 1992, see http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/not92-236.html. Applications must include a description of a program to provide formal or informal instruction in scientific integrity or the responsible conduct of research. Applications without plans for instruction in the responsible conduct of research will be considered incomplete and will be returned to the applicant without review.

- Although the NIH does not establish specific curricula or formal requirements, all programs are encouraged to consider instruction in the following areas: conflict of interest, responsible authorship, policies for handling misconduct, data management, data sharing, and policies regarding the use of human and animal subjects. Within the context of training in scientific integrity, it is also beneficial to discuss the relationship and the specific responsibilities of the institution and the graduate students or postdoctorates appointed to the program.

- Plans must address the subject matter of the instruction, the format of the instruction, the degree of faculty participation, trainee attendance, and the frequency of instruction.

- The rationale for the proposed plan of instruction must be provided.

- Program reports on the type of instruction provided, topics covered, and other relevant information, such as attendance by trainees and faculty participation, must be included in future competing continuation and noncompeting applications. The NIH encourages
institutions to provide instruction in the responsible conduct of research to all graduate students, postdoctorates, and research staff regardless of their source of support.

NIH initial review groups will assess the applicant’s plans on the basis of the appropriateness of topics, format, amount and nature of faculty participation, and the frequency and duration of instruction.

The plan will be discussed after the overall determination of merit, so that the review panel’s evaluation of the plan will not be a factor in the determination of the priority score. Plans will be judged as acceptable or unacceptable. The acceptability of the plan will be described in an administrative note on the summary statement. Regardless of the priority score, applications with unacceptable plans will not be funded until the applicant provides a revised, acceptable plan. Staff within the NIH awarding component will judge the acceptability of the revised plan.

Following initial review, the appropriate NIH institute or center council, board, or other advisory group also reviews applications. These advisory groups will consider the assessment of the scientific and educational merit of the research training grant application as well as the initial review group’s comments on the recruitment of individuals from underrepresented minority groups and the plan for instruction in the responsible conduct of research.