

Talking Points for Open Advisory Council Sessions

January 2026

Leveraging Funding Policies (Director's Statement)

Vision: Consistent and unified NIH-wide approach for funding the most meritorious science, addressing health priorities, and supporting a robust biomedical workforce.

Core Tenets of ICO Funding Policies:

Align with NIH's and ICO's stated mission and strategic priorities.

Prioritize scientific merit, program relevance and program balance.

Incorporate the breadth of the ICO's research portfolio and approaches.

Consider investigator career stage and sustainability of the biomedical research workforce.

Consider the total amount of NIH funding available to the investigator to promote distribution of funding.

Align with the availability of funds from the ICO.

Implementing the Unified NIH Funding Strategy to Guide Consistent and Clearer Award Decisions (continued)

Goals:

- Help guide clearer and consistent funding decisions across all Institutes, Centers, and Offices (ICOs)
- Strengthen accountability for research NIH supports
- Weigh the actual need, opportunity costs, and good stewardship of taxpayer investments
- Make NIH's research portfolio more robust

Effective January 2026 Council round

[Nexus Article for More](#)

Peer Review Remains Important (part of NIH's Unified Funding Strategy)

- Consider scores and reviewer comments in context of their and NIH's priorities, strategic plans, and budgets
- Not rely on funding paylines in developing pay plans
- ICO Directors will continue to have the delegated authority to decide what is funded by their ICOS

Emergency Modifications to NIH Peer Review

NIH plans to review all applications submitted for the January 2026 Councils and maintain the quality of review

Effects of Lapse in Appropriations (October/November 2025)

- Over 370 meetings were cancelled
- More than 11,000 reviewers
- More than 24,000 applications

Rationale for rescheduling study sections

- Committed to accomplishing three full rounds of peer review in FY 2026
- Canceling a round of review would be harmful to applicants and the research enterprise
- Maintain high quality peer review

Emergency Modifications

- Reduce the percentage of applications discussed in most meetings.
 - Middle third will not be discussed but will still be considered for funding (referred to as "competitive but not discussed")
- Simplify summary statements
- Release summary statements later in the Council round, and continuing to release scores within three business days of the meeting

[Nexus Article for More](#)

Multi-Year Funding

NIH required to use 50% of remaining competing RPG funds for full-year funded competing RPGs.

Funded in full at start of the project period from single FY of appropriations, not subsequent budget years.

Anticipate supporting fewer awards and researchers; lower success rates.

Evaluating for FY 2026

Foreign Subawards / Subproject Structure

New Application and Award Structure for International Collaborations

- Competing applications must be in response to a funding opportunity using a new grant type when requesting NIH funding for one or more foreign components
- Remain committed to supporting international scientific collaboration when it is in the U.S. interest.
- Conducted in a secure, justifiable, and responsible way.

[NOT-OD-25-104](#) (Nexus article for public)

- Continue to fund foreign components, structured as independent subprojects (no subawards)
- Implementing this new structure to provide accountability to the American public while continuing to enable important foreign collaborations to accelerate scientific discovery and improve the lives of all Americans.
- Aligns with NIH Director's fundamental principles

Burden Reduction as a Core Strategy

Core priority in 2025 and moving forward

Modernizing and simplifying policies balanced innovation and avoiding added complexity for investigators

NIH's [wider strategy](#) to simplify and streamline the application and funding processes

Examples:

- [Highlighted Topics](#) helps NIH inform the community of priority scientific areas without the need for issuing complex, new funding opportunities (see [more here](#)).
- Discontinuing requests for letters of intent prior to submitting grant applications
- Ending requirement for letters requesting permission to apply for budgets $\geq \$500,000$ in direct costs
- Simplifying how the research community [learns](#) about NIH grants and funding processes
- Future Directions: simplifying DMS plans and BESH

SBIR and STTR Lapse in Legislative Authority

- Legislative authority for the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs expired on Oct. 1, 2025.
- NIH released [NOT-OD-26-006](#) to provide guidance to the community.
- During a lapse in SBIR STTR authorization:
 - No active SBIR and STTR Notices of Funding Opportunity (NOFOs), not accepting applications or proposals.
 - No new SBIR or STTR awards (grants or contracts).
 - No noncompeting continuation awards.
 - Active SBIR and STTR grants and contracts can continue.

Other Notable Changes to NIH Grants Policies

Authority to terminate award if no longer effectuates program goals or agency priorities

Implementing Common Forms for Biographical Sketch and Other Support for Due Dates on or after January 25, 2026

Compliance Requirements for Renegotiated Aims, Objectives, Titles, and Abstracts

Prior approval requests must be submitted in eRA for all grants/cooperative agreements

Learn more on NIH Grants and Funding Notices of NIH Policy Changes

Appendix A: Slides for Consideration from Prior Councils

New Resource: Highlighted Topics

<https://grants.nih.gov/funding/find-a-fit-for-your-research/highlighted-topics>

Highlighted Topics Resource

- Informs the research community about NIH areas of scientific interest.
- Encourages investigator-initiated applications in those topic areas.
- May include new or emerging areas.
- Will expire after 1 year. NIH may extend.
- Help reduce NIH's use of funding opportunities by highlighting a topic instead (as appropriate).

Benefits for Research Community

- Reduce the effort to search and apply for funding opportunities.
- Apply through one of the [NIH Parent Announcements](#) or other broad NIH opportunities at Grants.gov.
- Search topics by keyword and filter by participating NIH Institutes, Centers, or Offices.
- Weekly subscription emails of new topics released
- Check back often for new topics and webpage features.

Learn more in the [August 2025 NIH Extramural Nexus article](#).

Foreign Subawards / Subproject Structure (Additional Information)

NOT-OD-25-130 (NIH Extramural Nexus article)

Recently implemented a short-term solution that allows recipients to remove a foreign subaward involving human subjects from an existing award and renegotiate it as an administrative supplement.

Supports health and safety of research participants at international sites.

Enhances ability to transparently and reliably track financial obligations to foreign entities.

May allow for a wind down period accounting for the time needed for the recipient to notify the Institutional Review Board, develop a plan to promptly notify participants, and ensure there is appropriate therapy and follow-up for participants.

Additional pathway to facilitate the smooth transition of foreign subawards involving human subjects into the new award structure.

Prioritizing Human Based Research (NIH Extramural Nexus article)

NIH announced it will no longer develop new funding opportunities focused exclusively on animal models of human disease.

New funding opportunities involving animal models will be designed more broadly with language that also encourages various approaches be considered.

Researchers may propose any model they deem appropriate – including a combination of approaches – to answer a research question.

Goal: accelerate progress, encourage innovation, and ultimately improve the quality and validation of new approach methodologies.

Prioritizing human-based technologies and models, where scientifically valid and justified.

NIH will continue to support grants that use laboratory animal models if scientifically appropriate, justifiable, and with appropriate animal welfare oversight.

Supporting Fairness and Originality in NIH Research Applications **(NOT-OD-25-132)**

NIH will not consider applications that are either substantially developed by AI, or contain sections substantially developed by AI, to be original ideas of applicants.

NIH will only accept six new, renewal, resubmission, or revision applications from an individual PI or MPI for all Council rounds in a calendar year.