

R15: The Academic Research Enhancement Award

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Most statisticians know the National Institutes of Health (NIH) is a major source of funding for statistical methodology research relevant to the health sciences through investigator-initiated research grants. Less well known is that NIH has a variety of mechanisms, which vary according to purpose and target audience. Broad classes of mechanisms are research grants (R), training awards (K), and cooperative agreements (U). Cooperative agreements are for collaborative projects with NIH. Training awards generally support postdocs and early-stage professors. Research grants are the main class of awards for investigator-initiated ideas. Popular research grants among statisticians are traditional research project grants (R01), small research grants (R03), and exploratory/developmental research grants (R21).

The Academic Research Enhancement Award (AREA)/R15 grant mechanism supports research at domestic institutions (such as U.S. colleges) that receive less than \$6 million in NIH funding per year, based on funding in the last seven years. Eligibility is determined at the time of application and can differ by academic component within an institution; to learn if a particular academic component is eligible, see <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/area.htm>. Support is for up to three years, with up to \$300,000 per year in direct costs.

The proposed research is investigator-initiated and can be in any type of biomedical or behavioral science. Proposed work should be well grounded and well motivated by scientific problems, and collaboration with medical or behavioral researchers is encouraged.

There are three stated goals of the AREA/R15 program: support meritorious research, strengthen the research environment of the institution, and expose students to research. All research grants share the first goal. The second and third goals are additional criteria for this mechanism.

AREA/R15 grant applications are evaluated by an NIH study section, such as the Biostatistical Methods and Research Design (BMRD) study section, which consists of prominent statisticians representing a wide range of scientific and application areas. Evaluation is based on all three goals. Therefore, in addition to describing the proposed research, applications should directly address the second and third goals. For example, the application can address the suitability of the institution for the award and the investigator's experience interacting with and engaging students (including undergraduates) in research. While AREA/R15

grants may be evaluated in the same study section as traditional R01 research grants, they do not compete directly with R01 grants.

Like other research grants at NIH, the time from submission to award is about nine months. There are three standard submission due dates per year for an AREA/R15 grant: February 25, June 25, and October 25. Once submitted, applications are received by the Center for Scientific Review and referred to a study section for review and an institute for potential funding. The study section provides the first level of review to judge the proposal's scientific merit and responsiveness to the goals of the mechanism. On this basis, the grant receives a priority score.

Unlike R01 grants, in which the priority score determines a percentile rank based on scores from all R01 grants evaluated at the current and previous two meetings of the study section (e.g., BMRD), AREA/R15 grants are not percentiled. Institutes provide the second level of review, and funding decisions are partially based on an institute-established payline. Unlike the percentile payline for R01s, which makes the proportion of funded to received R01 grants approximately equal across study sections, the payline for AREA/R15 grants is based on the priority score.

For more information about eligibility, criteria, and application procedures for the AREA/R15 grant mechanism, see <http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/area.htm> or email National Cancer Institute program director, Michelle C. Dunn, at dunnm3@mail.nih.gov. ■

Accreditation Committee Formed

The ASA's voluntary accreditation program is under way and the Accreditation Implementation Committee has been formed. Members of the team include the following:

Mary Batcher	Bob Mason
Judy-Anne Chapman	David Morganstein
Christy Chuang-Stein	Jeri Mulrow
Iain Johnstone (chair)	Teri Utlaut
Nancy Kirkendall	Geert Verbeke

Working from guidelines approved by the ASA Board in August of 2009, this committee will provide recommendations for launching and operating the accreditation program. These recommendations are expected to be ready for board consideration by April of 2010. For details about the voluntary accreditation program, visit <http://www.amstat.org/news/VoluntaryAccreditationofStatisticians.cfm>. ■