

NIH/NCI Response to COVID-19

Oliver Bogler, PhD, Director, Center for Cancer Training, NCI, NIH
Health Research Alliance meeting

9/21/2020

oliver.bogler@nih.gov

NIH Guidance on COVID-19 Pandemic

- Main page: <https://grants.nih.gov/policy/natural-disasters/coronavirus.htm>
- Overall concept: maximal flexibility for the community within what is possible given federal law, NIH rules and funding levels
- Need to balance the needs of today's grantees with those of tomorrow's applicants given limited resources
- **Advice:** reach out to NIH institute and center contacts with questions – the earlier the better

NIH Stance on COVID-19 Pandemic: Maximal Flexibility

- Areas/types of flexibility:
 - For applicants
 - Submission deadlines initially – no longer in effect
 - Eligibility windows for certain mechanisms can be extended
 - If required, contingency plans will be considered by NIH staff before funding
 - Reviewers instructed to assume temporary problems will be resolved, and to disregard situations due to COVID-19 e.g. temporary decline in productivity
 - For current grantees
 - Flexibilities managed by the funding Institute or Center e.g. NCI
 - Flexibilities may include extensions, carryovers, supplements and other adjustments
 - For grant mechanisms with a “clock” or a transition extensions or adjustments of the timing can be considered e.g. K22, K99/R00
 - Reach out to your Program Officer

Perspective of NCI's Center for Cancer Training

- For training funding mechanisms:
 - Research training continuity a consideration: even if trainees are near the end of their project, they may need additional time to secure the next position, and lack of support may lead them to abandon the academic track
 - No-cost-extensions may not be useful as training and career development awards mostly fund stipend/salary
 - While research activity declined during the pandemic, temporarily reducing research activity related costs, stipend/salary costs continued

Some examples from NCI's Center for Cancer Training

- K22 awardee in process of seeking a tenure-track faculty position requested an extension of her letter of intent to commit funds - granted 12 month extension
- F31 grantee's graduation had been delayed to 8/18/2020 - granted funded extension from 5/1/2020 to 8/18/2020 to enable them to complete needed research training
- T32 fellows reassigned to clinical duties during the COVID-19 pandemic, which would ordinarily lead to their departure from the grant. Kept their research work going as well. Allowed them to continue.

Partnership with community funders

- Notice of Special Interest (NOSI): National Cancer Institute (NCI) Emergency Administrative Supplements for Research and Training Continuity of Postdoctoral Fellows during Coronavirus Disease 2019 (COVID-19) (<https://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-CA-20-082.html>)
 - Goal was to bridge-fund postdocs in the lab of NCI-funded investigators who were on competitive community fellowships and were experiencing a funding short fall – ran for 6 weeks 7/6-8/15
 - NCI allocated ~\$1M in funding
 - Requires mentor to have an NCI RPG e.g. R01 through which the supplement would flow and on whose aims the postdoc would work
 - Co-funding by home institution was taken into consideration