

NIH Diversity Supplement Guidance from a Penn Med Student

“The NIH diversity supplement augments a larger NIH grant - usually R01 or R21s and usually NOT training or institutional grants. Given the competitive nature of these parent grants, the principal investigator you are looking to work for must have a very strong NIH funding track record, likely with a large lab and numerous publications. You can check whether a PI has any of these NIH grants via <https://projectreporter.nih.gov/reporter.cfm>

The NIH is divided into several institutes which will likely each have their own requirements for the diversity supplement application. I identified early on that I wanted to do cancer research, so I directly reached out to the NCI's diversity office representative. All of our communication with the NIH ended up going through her.

Usually, those receiving these funds are undergrads, graduate students and post-docs - you will likely have to spend some additional time on your application explaining your prior and future commitment to research, and how you hope to integrate it into your career.

If your project has multiple areas of focus, it doesn't hurt to have more than one mentor - my application had 3 - all of whom had to submit their NIH biosketch in the application.

The application is long - mine ended up being about 30+ pages, so make sure you and your mentor give yourselves enough time for the submission. The format of the application will be outlined in the guideline for the supplement.

The committee usually takes a few months to review the application. The NCI's version had two deadlines for submission and evaluation - I ended up submitting my application by the March 30th deadline. Their response was supposed to come out in June, but I ended up hearing from them mid-July - in the meanwhile we also had to submit an addendum explaining how we thought this year out would be beneficial to my career, per the reviewing committee's request.

In July, the application came up as "recommended for funding" - which meant it was approved but still had to go through a lengthy process to evaluate how much we were asking for (around 60K for stipend/benefits/supplies/travel, per my institution's guidelines) and then process the funds. The funds were eventually received by the institution I'm working for around late August. After that, I had a bit of HR complications with the institution I am working for, because they had never hired a pre-doctoral research fellow who was a student at another institution. This part might be a little easier if staying at Penn.

Overall, this is not an easy application but is, in and of itself, a helpful and rewarding learning process.”

- Beatrice Razzo

Penn Med Student (grad 2018)