

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDER TO SUPPORT EARLY CAREER RESEARCHERS (ECRS)

From: Erin Gibson's [presentation](#) at the HRA Members Meeting September 21, 2020 and ["How Support of Early Career Researchers Can Reset Science in the Post-COVID19 World"](#) (Cell Commentary)

Background:

The COVID19 crisis has magnified the systemic issues of academic research, but also provides the scientific establishment with an unprecedented opportunity to reset. A concerted effort by nonprofit funding agencies to rethink how we support scientists with a special emphasis on Early Career Researchers could help strengthen the foundation of academic science.

During Dr. Gibson's [presentation](#) and in the [Cell commentary](#), three systemic issues that plague the conduct of research were detailed. They are listed below, followed by recommended strategies to help ensure success and stability of ECRs post-COVID19 to help chip away at the systemic issues affecting the scientific establishment.

Excess does not Equal Excellence:

The desire for "more" results in delays in publication, the awarding of grants, and career advancement ECRs. It also stymies creativity and encourages the proliferation of low-quality publications and journals. COVID has changed the review model. Grant and journal reviewers are told during this time NOT to ask for more data, more figures, or more experiments. There is no reason to return to old habits of demanding "more."

Diversification Leads to Discovery:

The COVID19 crisis will only highlight the rampant diversity issues plaguing the scientific establishment, many of which begin with the loss of women and minorities during early career stages and may lead to further disenfranchisement of the disadvantaged.

Rethink the fundamentals of Funding:

Funding is needed at all levels. But early career researchers should be particularly supported as the trend of shifting funding away from younger researchers has no end in sight.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FUNDERS TO FACILITATE A "RESET" TO ADDRESS THE SYSTEMIC ISSUES NOTED ABOVE.

- **Simplification of the grant application process.**
 - Streamline the applications. Too much time is spent formatting and reformatting. Consistency across application systems would increase efficiency for applicants and funding agencies.
 - Require fewer supplemental materials.
 - Increase use of the LOI process to save time for both applicants and funding agencies.
 - Require less preliminary data (like the [NIMH BRAIN Initiative R01](#) or the [NIH Director's New Innovator Award DP2](#) mechanisms.)
- **Give more feedback on the strengths and weaknesses of grant applications.**

Provide at least a short summary of why the grant was not funded. This would be extremely valuable for ECR's who are still honing their grantsmanship skills.
- **Encourage faculty with existing grants to include EC faculty on applications for supplemental funding.**

Many new funding opportunities are geared toward supplementing existing grants. Asking faculty with existing grants to include EC faculty on those applications can foster collaboration and resource sharing.
- **Extend deadlines**
 - Funders should extend early career investigator status for grant applications.
 - Funders should continue to extend deadlines for applications, progress reports, and provide no cost extensions for the duration of lab disruptions.
- **Focus funding on Early Career Researchers**
 - Create bridge funding mechanisms for faculty who are between projects or aim to switch research areas following the COVID19 crisis or other mechanisms to help ECR's before they receive their first R01

OTHER IDEAS SUGGESTED THAT FUNDERS CAN EXPLORE:

- Allow use of grant dollars for childcare support.
- Allow use of grant dollars (or supplemental funding) to pay for learning new computational skills to enhance capacity for computational or data science research. (There are also many free online resources available to supplement acquisition of coding skills.)
- Check in with trainees and early career faculty often to offer support.
- Provide mentoring by pairing early career awardees with members of your SAB, review panels, and with more senior awardees, etc.
- Create opportunities for networking -
- Identify and provide support for mental health resources.

Summary from Maryrose Franko, 10/16/2020