Strategic Planning and Program Development:
Smith Family Foundation: Odyssey Award

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Health Resources in Action
Advancing Public Health and Medical Research

Overview

- **Goal**: Fuel creativity and innovation in junior investigators in basic biomedical research
  - Funds creative and novel lines of research that are distinct from the applicants' current research directions
  - $300,000 over 2 years
  - Between 4-9 years from their first independent faculty appointment and have not yet received tenure
  - No more than $750,000 in combined federal and non-federal direct costs

Program Origin

- In 2016, the Richard and Susan Smith Family Foundation asked HRiA to identify a new high-impact award program to complement their existing career-launching junior investigator award program, the Smith Family Awards Program for Excellence in Biomedical Research, which began in 1991.

- John Kanki, former HRA board member and HRiA Scientific Director at the time, researched and presented several options to the Smith Trustees.
- The SFF asked John to conduct further research to evaluate these. This included:
  - Surveys of former awardees and institutional representatives
  - Interviews with funders of similar programs

Proposed Funding Programs

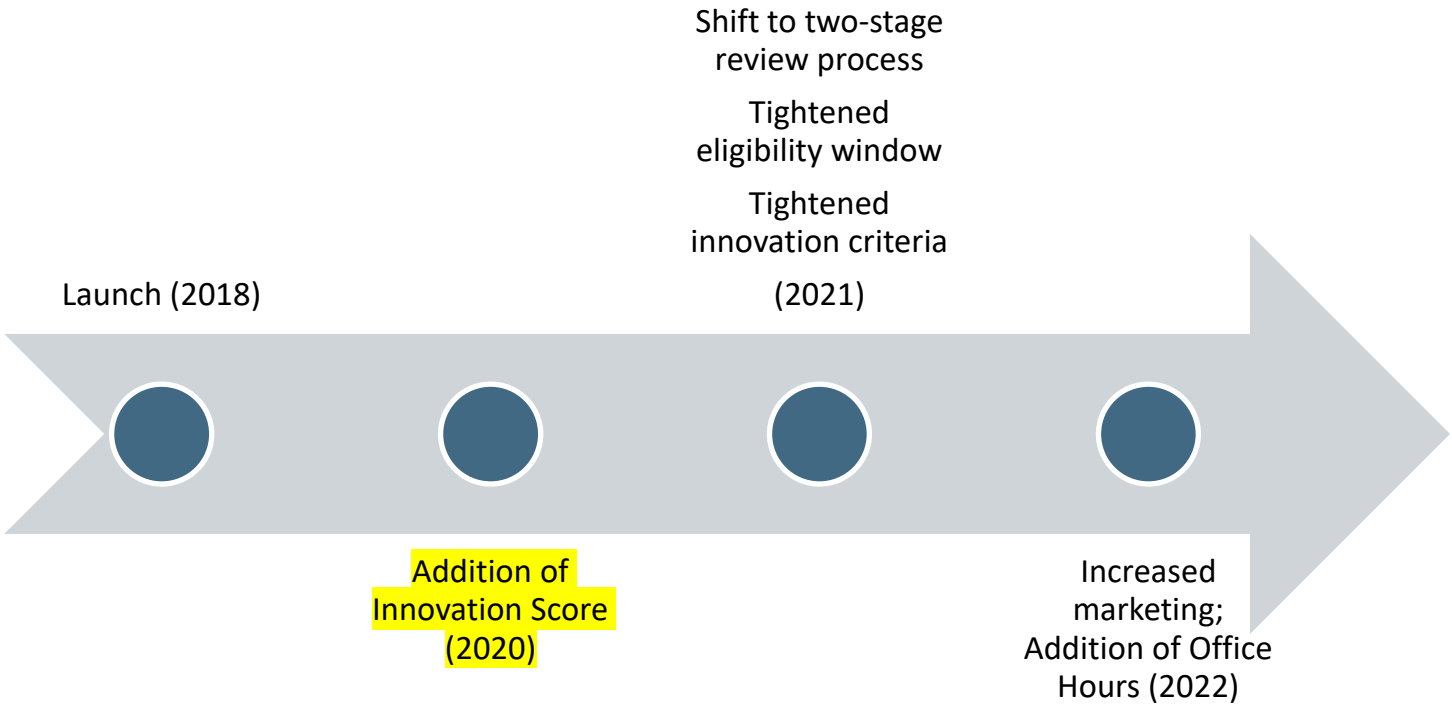
- Smith Transformation Awards (later renamed to Odyssey Awards)
  - To promote the exploration of new lines of scientific inquiry
- Smith Breakthrough Awards
  - To pursue the development of new technologies, tools, and experimental systems
- Smith Advancing Independence Awards
  - To pursue innovative scientific lines of inquiry that failed to be funded through the NIH despite their exceptional scientific merit

Research results

- Survey and interviews clearly favored the “Transformation Awards”
  - Targets new faculty who are within 4-9 years of the first independent appointment
  - Promotes the exploration of new lines of scientific inquiry

- Challenges addressed by the program
  - Support for basic science research
  - Risk-averse, conservative government funding
  - Junior investigators often cannot compete due to lack of preliminary data and track record
  - Administrative burden of applying for grants is substantial

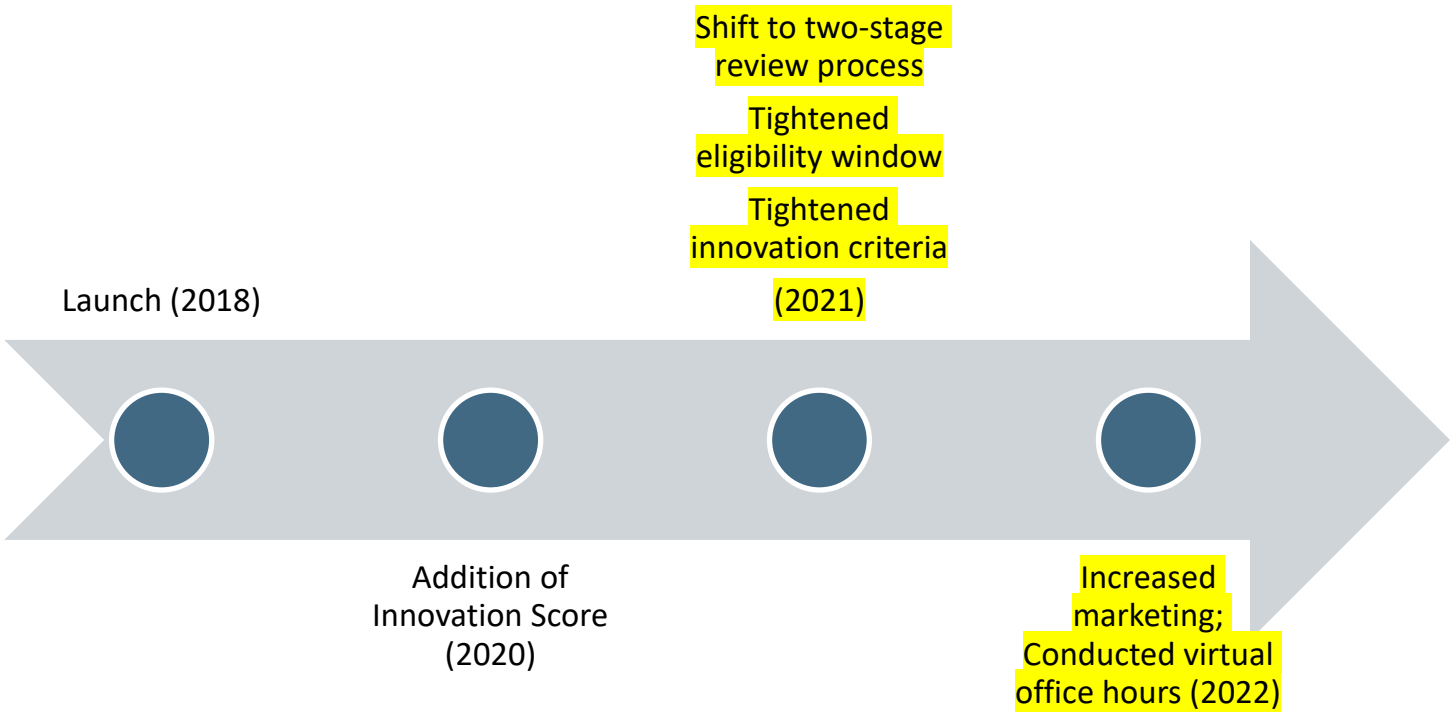
Iterative Program Improvements



Innovation Score

RED	Outstanding innovation and creativity, and distinct from current work. High impact idea that is likely to establish a ground-breaking new direction or research paradigm.
ORANGE	High innovation and creativity, and distinct from current work. High-medium impact idea with high potential to establish a ground-breaking new direction or research paradigm.
YELLOW	Moderate innovation and creativity, and distinct from current work. Medium impact idea with some potential to establish a new direction or research paradigm.
GREEN	Moderate innovation and creativity, and less distinct from current work. Low potential to establish a ground-breaking new direction or research paradigm.
BLUE	Low innovation and creativity, and less distinct from current work. Unlikely to establish a ground-breaking new direction or research paradigm.
PURPLE	Low innovation and creativity, and not distinguishable from current work. Unlikely to establish a ground-breaking new direction or research paradigm.

Iterative Program Improvements

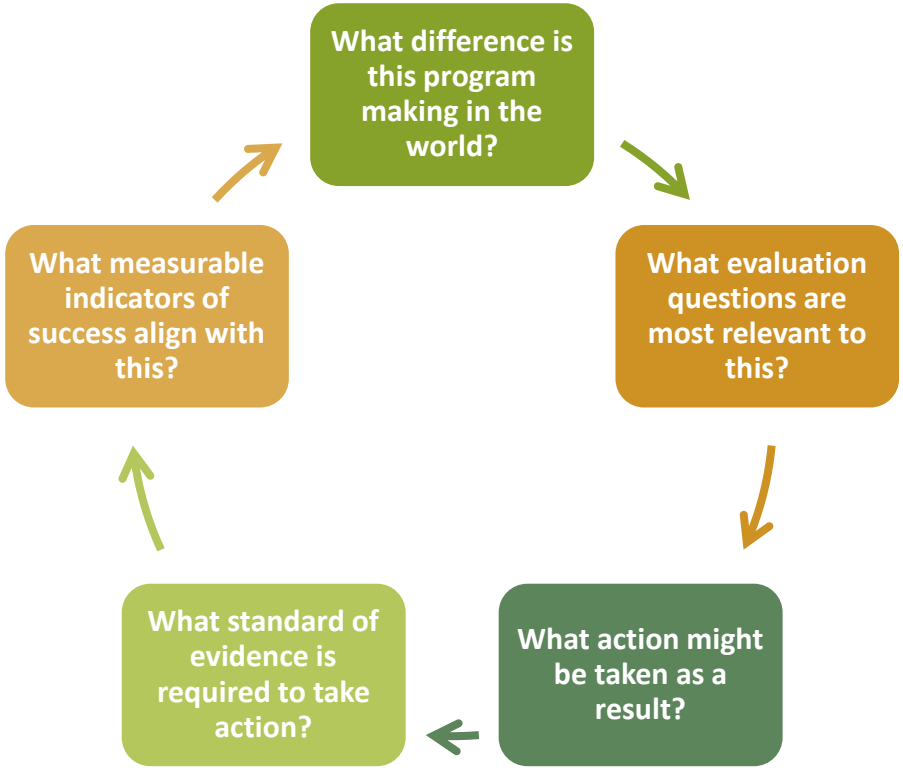


Measuring Success

Logic Model

Inputs	Activities	Outputs	Outcomes	Impact
• **RSSFF investments in:** • Odyssey research grants • Scientific convenings (Luncheon and Poster Session) • Management and oversight of grants (HRiA and Review Committee) • **Time/effort/ resources of:** • Researchers/ institutions: physical space, staff, equipment, administrative oversight • External reviewers and committee members • Research participants	• **RSSFF/HRiA:** • Disseminate RFA • Solicit grant applications and coordinate external review • Oversee ongoing grants including scientific and financial reporting • Plan and host scientific convenings • Explore/implement additional projects to advance the mission (e.g. communications project) • **Grantees:** • Conduct research • Share data/resources • Train new researchers • Collaborate and communicate work within and across disciplines	• **Grantees:** • Exploration of new directions in research • Publications • Presentations • Patents • Collaborations • Research staff trained (graduate students, postdocs, technicians) • Communication, networking, and relationship building at convenings	• **Short term** • Increased incentivization for funded and unfunded junior faculty to think creatively and develop proposals to pursue novel research directions • Increased level of creativity and innovation in funded junior faculty research • More connection across different strands of research among junior faculty in the Boston area • **Medium/long term** • Scientific advances in new directions of research • New collaborations among grantees • NIH and other funding invested in new area	• **New directions in biomedical research are established** • **Research breakthroughs are generated**

Learning Agenda



Evaluation Questions

Fuel creativity and innovation

- Has the Odyssey program increased incentivization for **unfunded** junior faculty to think creatively and develop proposals to pursue novel research directions?
- Has the program increased the level of creativity and innovation in **funded** junior faculty research?
- Has the program resulted in more connection across different strands of research among junior faculty in the Boston area?

Drive new research directions

- Are new lines of biomedical research being established as a result of this program?
- Are scientific advances being made in these new directions of research?
- How much NIH and other funding was subsequently invested in the new research directions initially seeded by RSSFF?

Generate Break-throughs

- Have research breakthroughs been generated as a result of this program?

Evaluation Plan