

NIBIB-HHMI INTERFACES INITIATIVE
For Interdisciplinary Graduate Research Training
Frequently Asked Questions (Phase II)
(Phase I FAQs may be found at
http://www.hhmi.org/grants/pdf/comp_annnc/interfaces_faq.pdf)

BIG PICTURE

1. How involved will NIBIB staff be in Phase I and HHMI staff in Phase II?

NIBIB and HHMI staff are and will continue to be actively involved in both phases of this initiative, participating in program assessment meetings, grantee meetings, site visits, and long-term evaluation meetings.

2. What do you expect the funding rate to be for Phase II?

It is impossible to predict the funding rate, because it depends on the number, quality, and financial needs of the applications we receive. However, NIBIB has planned for and anticipates making at least 10-12 Phase II awards.

3. Do you expect training programs to be associated with new interdisciplinary departments or degree-granting programs?

No. We realize that, depending upon the institution and the chosen theme, it may be difficult or even undesirable to create new departments or degree-granting programs. We do expect institutions to institutionalize these programs and to clearly recognize students, regardless of their background or home department, for their interdisciplinary accomplishments. This may be done through a new degree-granting program or by granting a minor or specialization in the appropriate interdisciplinary field.

4. The first two years of graduate training of any new training program will include interdisciplinary coursework, but how can students' training be prevented from becoming more narrowly defined and less interdisciplinary once they enter a thesis lab?

We expect the faculty to provide an interdisciplinary research environment throughout the graduate training, especially during the laboratory-based part of the program. Participation in interdisciplinary research during a student's entire Ph.D. experience is an important aspect of this program. We expect that this will result in the creation of an interdisciplinary community and increase the number of interdisciplinary researchers working at the intersection between the biological and physical sciences and engineering.

5. Do you expect the training program to be longer than traditional graduate training programs?

No, we expect the training provided through these new programs to be a different type of research training, not additional training.

6. After the end of Phases I and II, will the programs be folded into the traditional NIH Institutional Training Grant (T32) application process?

Yes. We expect the interdisciplinary training programs developed in Phase I and Phase II to be sustained through the traditional T32 mechanism.

7. Will this initiative be offered in subsequent years?

We have no current plans to re-issue the Interfaces initiative. Any future competition will depend on the success of the current initiative and the unmet needs in graduate science education and research training.

INSTITUTIONAL ELIGIBILITY

8. Are foreign institutions eligible to apply or to be collaborating institutions?

No. Although we recognize the value of collaborations with foreign institutions, this initiative is targeted only to U.S. institutions. Applicants and collaborating institutions must be in the United States.

9. May applicants propose multiple Program Directors?

Yes. Multiple Program Director applications will be accepted but, if proposed, must provide a Leadership Plan that describes the rationale for choosing this approach, the governance and organizational structure of the leadership team, and indicates how this arrangement will benefit the program and the trainees. Because training programs are intended to be coherent, NIH will not allocate the budget or training positions between multiple Program Directors.

10. Are multi-institutional collaborations eligible to apply?

Yes. We think that in many cases collaboration among institutions will be very effective. However, all Phase II applications must designate a lead institution and this institution must make administrative arrangements to disperse funds to the collaborating institution(s) (see [BUDGET](#) section below). In addition, the program director at the lead institution is responsible for collecting data, submitting progress reports and financial reports on behalf of the collaborating institutions.

11. Can institutions submit more than one application?

The original RFA required institutions, whether they were applying as a single entity or representing a multi-institutional consortium, to submit only one application. Although we have recently relaxed this requirement (<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/notice-files/NOT-EB-08-003.html>), we strongly encourage the various schools of multi-component institutions to join together in the submission of a single application.

12. Will this program support interdisciplinary M.D./Ph.D. programs?

As designed, this program is not intended to support dual-degree (e.g., M.D./Ph.D.) training. There are specific NIH and HHMI programs that support M.D./Ph.D. training, such as the NIGMS Medical Student Training Program (MSTP) and the HHMI Med to Grad initiative. However, the Interfaces program can be used to develop the Ph.D. portion of an M.D./Ph.D. program as long as it fulfills all the other requirements and is not used to support medical education.

13. Are undergraduate or master's level programs eligible for support?

No. We recognize the importance of strong interdisciplinary training at the undergraduate and master's levels. However, this initiative focuses on predoctoral training for several reasons, one of which is that the NIH National Research Service Award (NRSA) (the funding mechanism we emulated in Phase I and are using for Phase II) stipulates that NRSA-supported students must be enrolled in a Ph.D. program. In addition, NIBIB (in partnership with the NSF) and HHMI already award grants or contracts to institutions to support innovative science education programs at the undergraduate level.

14. Are proposals other than those targeting bioimaging or bioengineering responsive to this initiative? For example, can we propose developing a program that brings together only biology, chemistry, and physics?

Yes. Programs eligible for funding must integrate the biological sciences with the physical sciences or engineering. There is no requirement or preference for any specific scientific field or training topic.

15. Should the scientific focus of the proposed program provide training that can be applied broadly across biological systems, or should the focus be narrower?

We do not have a preference and we anticipate that the portfolio of funded grants will have both types of programs. We suggest that you consider the scientific expertise at your institution and propose a program that best fits that expertise. The program most likely to be successful at your institution will have the best chance for success in review.

16. Are institutions with potentially overlapping external funding (e.g., an NIH Roadmap or NSF IGERT award) eligible to apply? Will applying for this grant exclude an institution from applying for other similar grants?

If the funds awarded by other organizations are modest, then the institution is still eligible to apply. If the funds are substantial and overlap significantly, eligibility might be an issue. These cases will be evaluated individually and potential applicants should contact NIBIB before submitting a Phase II application. You are not eligible if you already have a Roadmap T90, NSF IGERT, or similar grant supporting the program activities in your application.

GRADUATE STUDENT SUPPORT

17. Will this initiative support foreign graduate students?

Foreign graduate students cannot be financially supported by the T32 NRSA mechanism since NRSA regulations do not permit the appointment of individuals who are not U.S. citizens or permanent residents to training programs. These individuals may participate in the training program as long as they are funded through institutional resources or with R01 grants.

18. How long should students be financially supported by the training program?

NRSA regulations require that trainees be appointed full-time for at least one year and NIH recommends that trainees be supported for a two year period (http://grants.nih.gov/grants/policy/nihgps_2003/NIHGPS_Part10.htm#_Toc54600187). Trainees would then be expected to rotate off the training program and be financially supported by other means (usually R01 grants), although they would remain a part of the training community.

BUDGET

19. What will a typical budget look like for Phase II?

Unlike in Phase I, Phase II applications will be focused on providing graduate student support. As such, the budgets of these applications will be tied to the number of students supported by the program and governed by NRSA program guidelines. Allowable expenses include student stipends (currently \$20,772/trainee and annually adjusted by NIH), student tuition and fees (100% up to \$3,000 and 60% of remaining tuition costs up to a maximum of \$16,000 per trainee), training-related expenses (including health insurance) (currently \$4,200/trainee), and student travel.

20. Will Phase II support from NIBIB have a capped budget?

Yes. Applicants cannot request more than \$500,000 in direct costs in any grant year. The actual amount of Phase II support will depend primarily on the number of training slots requested by the applicant and on other factors like tuition costs.

21. Will Phase II support be limited to 10 training slots?

Yes. During Phase II, a maximum of 10 trainees can be supported at any given time on the training grant award. Although a maximum of 10 training slots will be funded by NIBIB, an institution can supplement these stipends with institutional or other nonfederal funds to support more students in the program.

22. How should multi-institutional consortia request funds for their partnering institutions?

Multi-institutional consortia must designate a lead institution and this institution must make administrative arrangements to disperse funds to the collaborating institution(s). The lead institution should describe the resources and facilities at each collaborating institution and, in the consortium/contractual arrangements section of their application, explain the administrative, programmatic, and fiscal arrangements to be made between their institution and the collaborating institution(s). If training slots will be allocated

among collaborating institutions, this should be specified and separate budgets, following NRSA guidelines, should be submitted for each institution. The signature of the authorized organizational official on the Face Page will signify that the applicant and all consortium participants are aware of the NIH's consortium agreement policy and are prepared to establish the necessary inter-organizational agreement(s) consistent with that policy.

23. Is there a requirement for matching institutional funds?

No, there is no formal requirement for matching funds in either Phase I or Phase II. However, the level of institutional commitment is a major factor in the evaluation for both program phases. We expect the new programs created as a result of this initiative to be institutionalized and sustained by the submitting institution. Therefore, we expect applicants to provide evidence that the institution is committed to supporting the proposed program.

REVIEW PROCESS

23. Please provide more details about the Phase II review process.

The review team will be assembled from potential reviewers suggested by NIBIB and HHMI staff including, to the extent possible, many of the reviewers from the Phase I review panel. Ideally, the reviewers on the Phase II review panel will equally represent the various disciplines and fields covered in the proposals. We anticipate good representation from the biomedical science community as well as the physical science and engineering communities. In addition, we will choose reviewers who are committed to identifying new and innovative interdisciplinary training models and instruct these reviewers to value innovation and creativity more highly than traditional training approaches. We will also insure that the reviewers understand that these programs will not be fully developed and that the partnership between HHMI and NIBIB was designed to sustain these programs over the longer period needed to institutionalize such a training program.

24. According to the Phase I and Phase II program announcements, the institution's graduate student track record is considered in the review process. How can you expect a strong track record of supporting competitive graduate students if the programs have not yet graduated program trainees?

What we will be looking for is the institution's ability to attract competitive graduate students in relevant schools and departments and the history of the institution's commitment to support newly established programs after external support has been exhausted. We also will be looking at the institution's ability and plan to recruit and retain individuals from groups underrepresented in the biological and physical sciences.