



NIH DIRECTOR'S
**EARLY
INDEPENDENCE
AWARD**

NIH Director's Early Independence Award

Webinar for RFA-RM-27-004

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Office of the Director, NIH



National Institutes of Health
Office of Strategic Coordination–The Common Fund

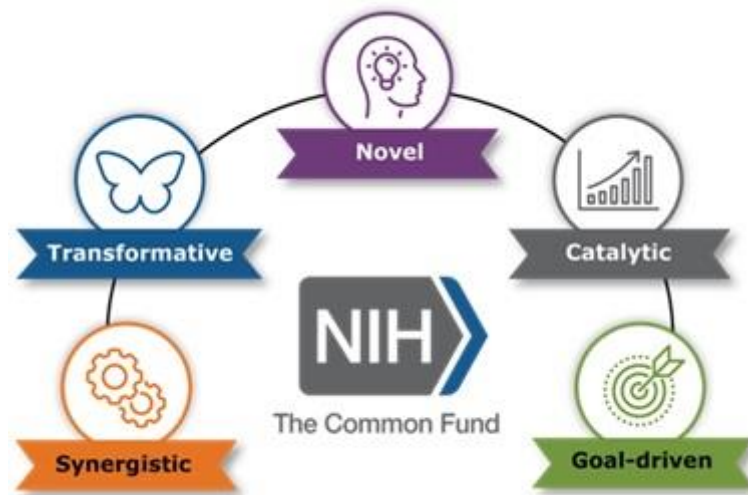
commonfund.nih.gov/earlyindependence

earlyindependence@od.nih.gov

The NIH Common Fund

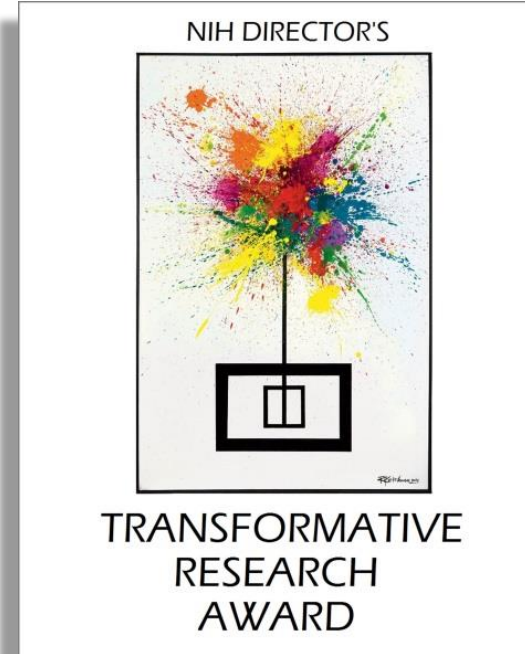
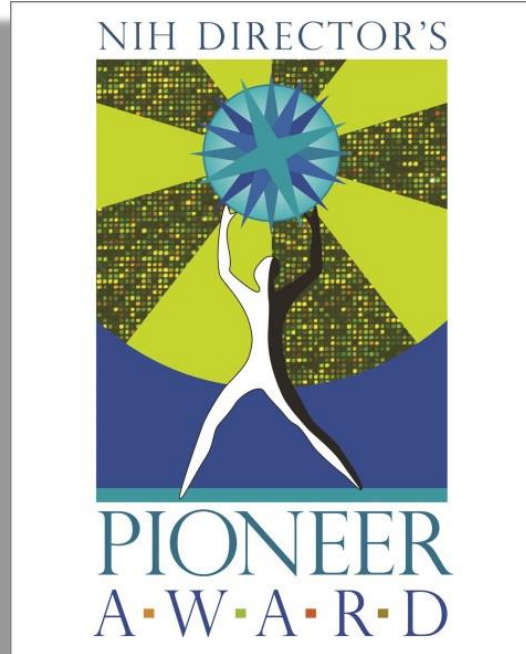
Mission:

To support **bold scientific programs that catalyze discovery** across all biomedical and behavioral research. Investigators and **multiple NIH Institutes, Centers, and Offices** collaborate on **innovative research** expected to address high priority challenges for the NIH as a whole and make a **broader impact in the scientific community**.



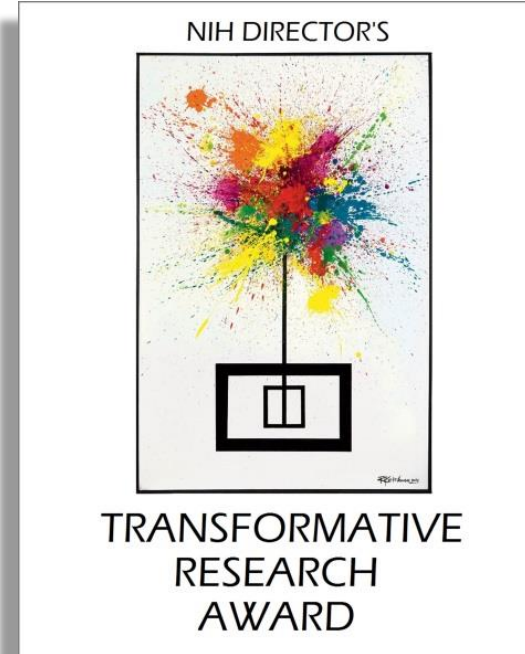
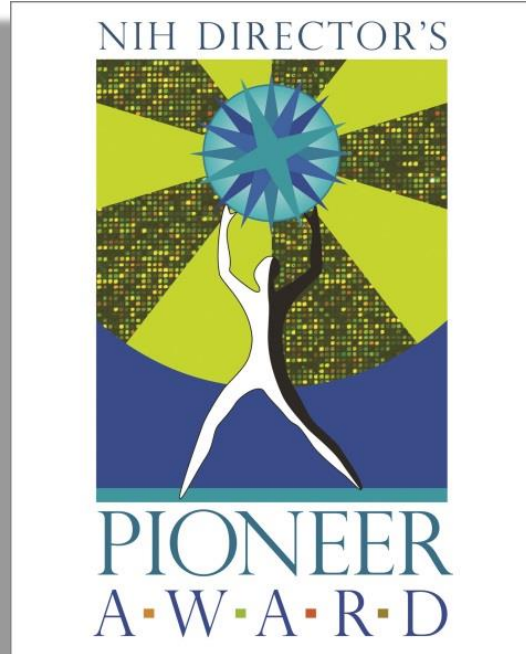
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High-Risk, High-Reward Research Program



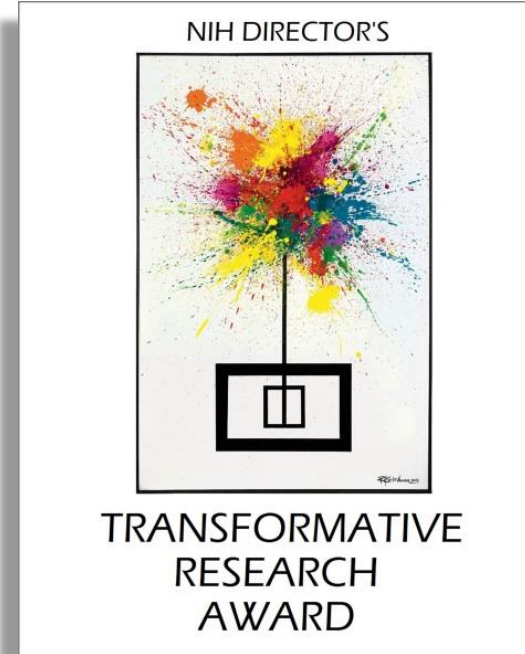
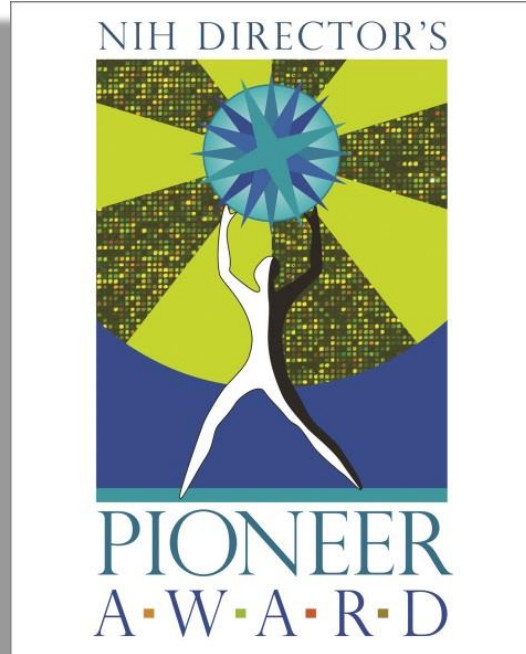
Supporting scientists at all career stages proposing outstanding high-risk, high-impact research

High-Risk, High-Reward Research Program



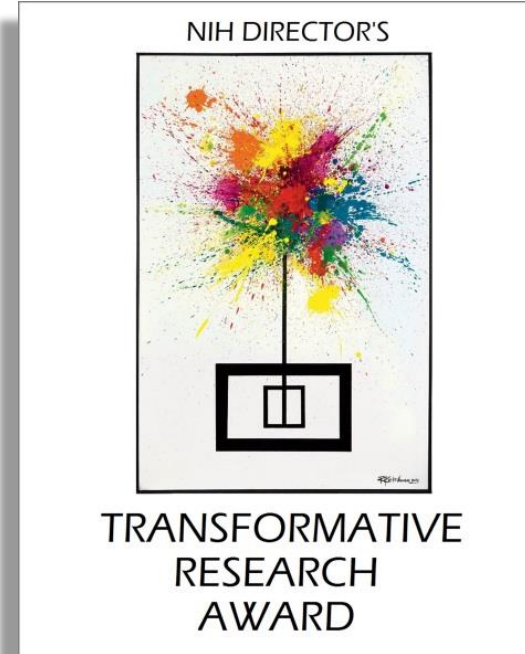
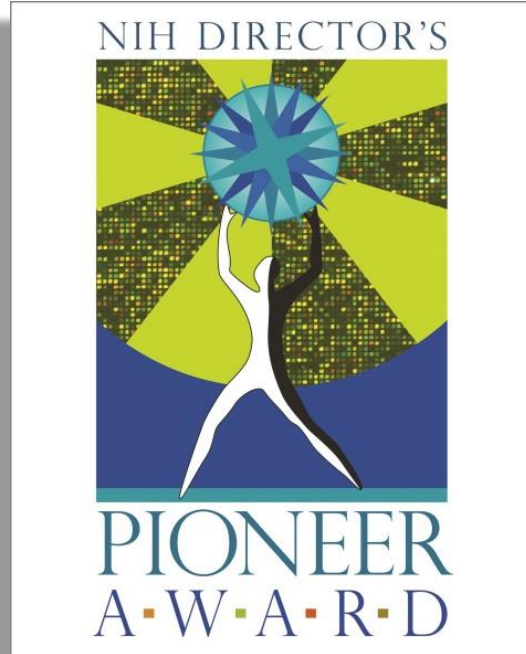
Annual funding opportunities

High-Risk, High-Reward Research Program



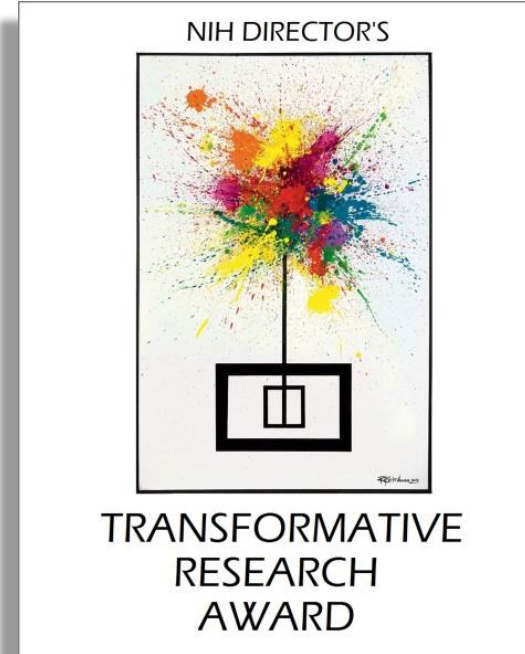
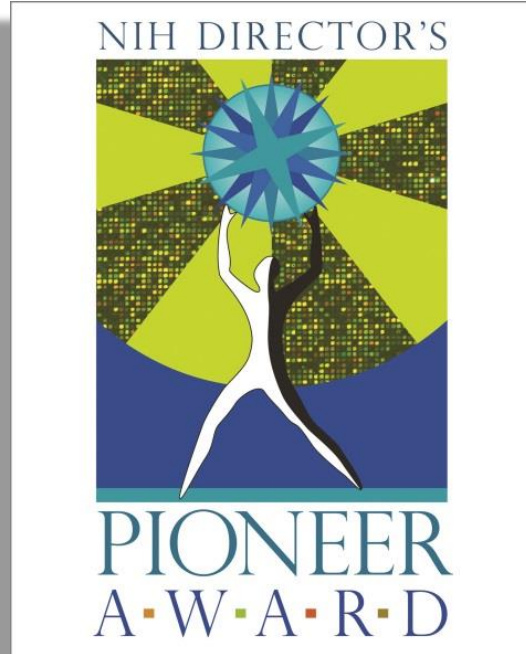
High-risk, high-impact ideas

High-Risk, High-Reward Research Program



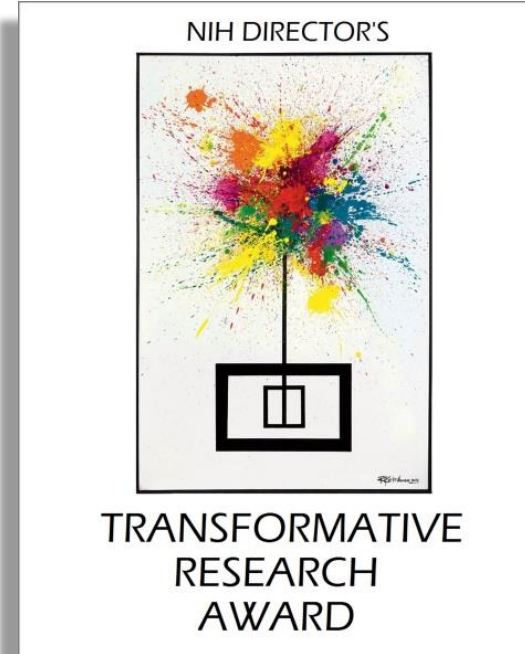
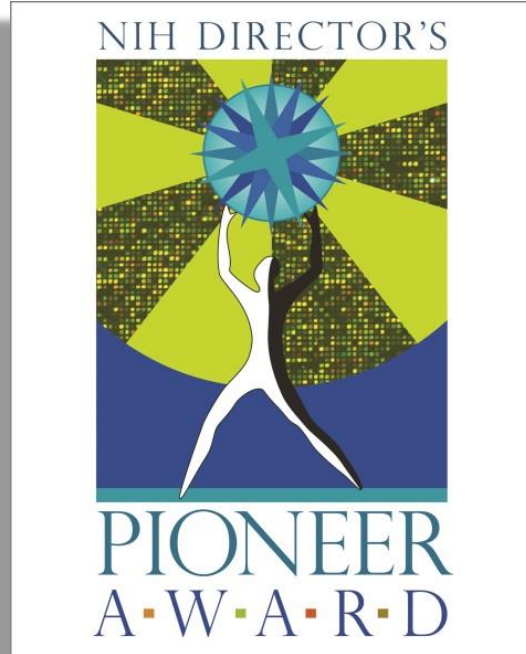
No preliminary data or detailed experimental plan required

High-Risk, High-Reward Research Program



Any topic relevant to NIH mission welcome
Behavioral, social, biomedical, applied, and formal sciences,
and basic, translational, or clinical research

High-Risk, High-Reward Research Program



Encourage applications from full spectrum of eligible institutions

High-Risk, High-Reward Research Program



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Enables outstanding early career scientists to move rapidly into independent research positions by skipping the traditional postdoc

- Single PI applications only
- Complete terminal research degree or clinical training between May 1, 2025, and September 30, 2027
- No previous postdoc experience >12 months
- Commit 9.6 months each year to research for first 2 years
- In non-independent position at time of application
- Requires independent position from host institution
- Limit of 2 applications per institution
- Awards up to **\$350,000** per year for 5 years
- Site visit in first year

Best tip...

Read the entire funding opportunity ([**RFA-RM-27-004**](#)).

- Follow the instructions in the [SF424 \(R&R\) Application Guide](#), except where the funding opportunity provides alternate instructions.
- Funding opportunity instructions supersede SF424 instructions.

DP5 Application

Application Limit	2 applications per institution
Research Strategy Essay	12 pages: • Scientific challenge and significance • Innovativeness of approach • Investigator's qualifications • Plans for development
Facilities & Other Resources	Institutional support detailed
Budget Information	R&R budget
Letters of Collaboration	Should be included
Biosketch	Only PI's is allowed
Research Effort	9.6 months per year for first 2 years
Letters of Reference	3-5 required

Select Scientific Areas

- Primary (required) and secondary (optional)
 1. Chemical Biology (CB)
 2. Clinical and Translational Research (CTR)
 3. Infectious Diseases and Immunology (IDI)
 4. Instrumentation and Engineering (IE)
 5. Molecular and Cellular Biology (MCB)
 6. Neuroscience (NS)
 7. High-Throughput and Integrative Biology (HIB)
 8. Bioinformatics and Computational Biology (BCB)
- Indicate on “SF424 (R&R) Cover Form” in Agency Routing Identifier

Facilities & Other Resources (Institution)

- Important section that should not be overlooked
- Tailor to candidate and avoid overuse of boilerplate language
- Provide context for reviewers
- Answer questions in the following headings:
 - ***Candidate selection process*** – how and why candidate selected
 - ***Position details*** – description of the position
 - ***Institutional resources commitment*** – description of the lab space, office space, facilities, supplies, equipment, administrative staff, support staff, additional funds, etc. provided by the institution
 - ***Institutional commitment to career development*** – plans to ensure independence, mentorship, integration into community, resources, other opportunities

Budget

- **New budget limit of \$350,000 per year (direct costs)**
- Use R&R budget form, which requires budgetary details (see SF424 Guide)
- Budget changes can be made after award (some require NIH approval)
- Funds can be used to support personnel, supplies, equipment, and other allowable costs

Specific Aims

- Distillation of proposal into one page
- Use the following headings:
 - **Research Objectives** – describe research project, its significance, and overall approach
 - **Institutional Support** – how will the institutional support allow you to accomplish your research objectives
 - **Early Independence Rationale** – what qualifications, experience, and skills do you have that will allow you to accomplish your research objectives

Research Strategy Essay

Use following headings (12-page limit):

1. Rationale for skipping the postdoc
2. Evidence that you are not yet independent
3. Career development plan
4. Evidence of leadership
5. Host institution interactions
6. Research challenge
7. Approach
8. Innovation
9. Relationship to previous work
10. Timeline

Letters

Letter of Intent

- **Do not submit!** No longer used by NIH

Letters of Support

- No limit
- From those whose assistance is needed to successfully conduct the research (i.e., collaborators, consultants, resource centers)
- Institution should submit one to affirm their commitment to providing the resources, support, and independent research position outlined in application

Letters of Reference

- 3-5 letters
- From scientists or other people who can speak to the PI's qualifications and readiness for research independence
- Try to avoid conflicts of interest (people who directly benefit if award made)

Points to Consider

- Demonstrate that you are ready to launch an independent research program
- Show that your institution will provide the resources, environment, and support needed for your success
- Present an important research question and a compelling, innovative approach
- Write for a broad scientific audience—minimize jargon and provide enough context for reviewers outside your field
- Even without preliminary data, show that your project is well thought out by identifying potential risks, mitigation strategies, and alternative approaches
- Demonstrate a rigorous and robust research plan by describing how methods will be validated, justifying sample sizes (human or animal, as applicable), and addressing sex as a biological variable when appropriate

Review Process



General Review Considerations

- It is understood that the PI is at a very early stage of their research career and that substantial preliminary data are not required.
- The intent of the award is to enable the PI to start a productive, independent research career and have a significant impact on the field.
 - This is a big step to skip over postdoctoral training. It is essential that your readiness for this step is clear.
- **Focus on the promise of the investigator**
 - Biosketch and Letters of Reference are critical sources for evaluating the prospects and promise of the investigator.
- **Institutional support and commitment**
 - Specific details from the “facilities and other resources” section
 - Letters of support
- **Significance, innovation and approach of the science**

How Applications are Scored

- Overall impact score (1-9)
 - 1 indicates having the highest likelihood to make an impact, “the best”
- Five criteria (also on 1 to 9 scale):
 - Significance
 - ***Investigator***
 - Innovation
 - Approach
 - ***Environment***

Phase 1 Review – Subject Matter Experts

- All applications are reviewed in one Special Emphasis Panel.
- All CSR review branches participate in assigning expert reviewers to applications based on the appropriate scientific areas.
 - Science area designations help aid process
- Each application is assigned to three Phase 1 reviewers who are Subject Matter Experts; they provide full written critiques and scores.
- The primary focus is on the science.

Phase 2 Review - Editorial Panel

- The Panel includes senior scientists with broad expertise.
 - Scientific areas initially identified by PI during application submission are useful in assigning Editors.
- Each Editor is assigned ~12-15 applications after Phase 1 review is completed.
 - Editors review applications *and* the Phase 1 critiques, and assign an overall impact score to each application, using the 1-9 scale.
 - Editors do not write critiques.
- Panel meets in March to *discuss approximately top 50% of applications*.
 - 3 assigned reviewers present the application; all members discuss and score application.
- **Editorial Panel scores represent the final scores for the application.**

Panel Considerations

- Has the PI demonstrated the scientific creativity, intellectual sophistication, and the appropriate skills to launch a vigorous, independent research program?
- Will this award accelerate the candidate's research trajectory?
- Is the host institution committed to providing the PI scientific freedom, necessary resources, collaborating faculties, protected time, and appropriate support to develop an independent research program?
- How compelling is the evidence that the project could exert a sustained impact to the field?

Following the Review

- Applicants receive scores within 3-5 business days (in eRA Commons).
 - For *discussed* applications, a final score will be listed.
 - For *non-discussed* applications, no score will be listed; it will say “Not Discussed.”
- All applicants receive summary statements within 30 days.
 - Discussed applications receive a resume/summary of the Editorial Panel discussion and critiques from the Phase 1 reviewers.
 - Non-discussed applications receive the critiques from the Phase 1 reviewers.

Tips for Applicants

- Be *very specific* about the institutional support provided.
 - Provide evidence that the position & resources are sufficient for the project.
- Letters of reference should not sound generic. Advise letter writers to comment on what makes you unique and ready to take on this next step in your career.
- Some scientists who evaluate your application may not be from your field but will understand the challenges of doing research.
 - Clearly articulate the significance of your research and how it will advance science.
 - Set reasonable specific aims that can be accomplished within the project resources. Discuss plans to manage problems, long term goals, or next steps.



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Webinar recording & slides
will be posted on website