

NIMHD Loan Repayment Programs (L32, L60) Frequently Asked Questions

NIMHD MISSION

Question: Is research with international populations allowable? Does a global health disparity count under NIMHD's mission? Can I do research in an international population?

- **Answer:** Yes. However, research must be directed toward building a career as a Health Disparities researcher for the L60 and the issues must be explicitly applicable to US health disparity populations.

Question: I am also working on a project with people living with physical and cognitive disabilities. While participants in these projects are racially diverse, the “disparity focus” is disabilities; however, it looks to me as if the LRP does **not** include people living with disabilities in its scope of disparity populations. Is this true?

- **Answer:** Yes, you are correct. People with disabilities are not included in the legal definition of Health Disparity populations.

Question: Does "minority health disparity" only refer to racial and ethnic minority or do other minority populations such as sexual and gender minorities also fit?

- **Answer:** The following populations have been designated as health disparity populations: Blacks/African Americans, Hispanics/Latinos, American Indians/Alaska Natives, Asian Americans, Native Hawaiians and other Pacific Islanders, sexual/gender minority populations, socioeconomically disadvantaged populations, and rural populations. The addition of SGM populations was recently approved and is now permitted.

Question: Are individuals with disabilities considered a health disparities population under NIH guidelines?

- **Answer:** At this time, individuals with disabilities are not considered a health disparities population under NIH guidelines.

Question: Can you clarify whether a project that is a secondary data analysis that is supported by salary and start-up funds (i.e., faculty position) would be considered an eligible project for this award despite not being a project funded by an NIH grant?

- **Answer:** As long as research is supported by funding from not-for-profit agencies, the research is permissible. Secondary data analysis is acceptable. However, research questions must focus on minority health or health disparities.

Question: I am conducting health disparities research on a population that is mostly Hispanic/Latino (~70%) but also includes other racial/ethnic groups (mostly non-Hispanic white). Is it considered acceptable to research health disparities in a mixed group such as this?

- **Answer:** Health disparities is implicitly comparative; therefore, having a mixed racial/ethnic sample population is an advantage.

Question: I am 40% funded on a funded project that is not focused on minority health, is it better to not include that project or try to tease out the minorities who might be collected as part of the program? The other 60% of my funding is directly on minority health.

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- **Answer:** The applicant must make the case in every part of the application that he/she is on a trajectory to become an independent health disparities researcher. Research projects should focus on that trajectory.

RESEARCH PROJECTS/REQUIREMENT

Question: Do most people who apply for the LRP work on a single research project for at least 50% of their time during the contract period?

- **Answer:** Many applicants work on more than 1 project. If you describe more than 1 project, be sure to discuss how the work is related so you do not appear scattered and unfocused.

Question: Regarding the definition of research funding, would a postdoc on a NIH funded T32 that is supplemented by their academic institution be considered eligible?

- **Answer:** You are required to devote 50% time to research. Research support from a T32 with or without institution supplementation is acceptable.

Question: Does the applicant need to demonstrate two years for protected research *funding* from the time of application or the time of contract initiation? Or is it 2 years of a research *plan*?

- **Answer:** You must demonstrate a funded position for 2 years from the date of contract award. You can change institutions and take the LRP contract with by requesting a Change of Institution.

Question: Am I required to submit only a research project that I am leading as a PI, or may I submit my work that I am conducting on another PI's project?

- **Answer:** You should submit descriptions of the research on which you plan to work during the LRP period.

Question: As a research faculty but not a PI on my own project, am I considered independent, or mentored?

- **Answer:** If you have not received an R level grant from the NIH or a grant from another federal agency for \$100,000 or more you are still considered to be in a mentored position.

Question: I understand that we must be funded for our research. What if we are in the process for applying for funding to cover the proposed project that related to the LRP? Are we then ineligible?

- **Answer:** The academic institution must verify that the applicant is covered by research funding from the date of award through the two years of the initial award.

Question: "Clinical Research" must be conducted in "inpatient and outpatient settings" but traditional epi methods and other approaches are not conducted in patient settings. Could you clarify?

- **Answer:** For the L32 Clinical Research for Persons from Disadvantaged Backgrounds:
 - NIH defines Clinical Research as patient-oriented research conducted with human subjects, or research on the causes and consequences of disease in human populations involving material of human origin (such as tissue specimens and cognitive phenomena)

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for which an investigator or colleague directly interacts with human subjects in an outpatient or inpatient setting to clarify a problem in human physiology, pathophysiology or disease, or epidemiological or behavioral studies, outcomes or health services research, or developing new technologies, therapeutic interventions, or clinical trials.

- Epidemiological research is permitted if the investigator or a colleague directly interacts with human subjects.

Question: I'm in the process of ending a project and will be working on grant and additional projects. In my application, is it ok to discuss in my research plan projects that are not currently in the works?

- **Answer:** It is appropriate to discuss projects on which you will be working during the funding period of the LRP. However, if you discuss more than one project, you should take care to show how the projects are related and build on each other and you should discuss them in a manner that gives evidence that you know how to do and talk about research.

Question: If I am working 50% on a Health Disparities project and 50% on another project is there any need to mention the non-health disparities project in my application?

- **Answer:** The application should explicitly address health disparity or minority health issues and should reflect the applicant's understanding of how to write and talk about science. For that reason, we recommend following the format of an R level grant to give evidence of knowledge about how to present scientific ideas.

Question: What if grant funding for the research is discontinued during LRP period what happens to the LRP?

- **Answer:** If grant funding for the research is discontinued, please immediately contact the Program Official. If no other support can be secured, the applicant can apply to the Division of Loan Repayment for a Withdrawal Without Penalty.

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REVIEW

Question: What is the basis for the extensive time of review for applications (November submission and August notification), when other grants are reviewed on a very different time scale?

- **Answer:** Depending on the program, the Loan Repayment Program receives from hundreds to more than a thousand applications. Reviews are conducted in writing over a period of months not in a one or two-day session. The time allocated for the program includes many processes conducted by both Program and Review. Overall the time scale for the LRP review is like that of other mechanisms.

Question: How does one obtain an eRA Commons ID? Is the eRA Commons ID the same as the eRA Person ID we see on the Personal Profile Summary of eRA Commons?

- **Answer:** For instructions on how to obtain an eRA Commons account, please see: https://era.nih.gov/registration_accounts.cfm.
- The eRA Commons ID and eRA Person ID are the same.

FEEDBACK

Question: How can an applicant receive feedback once an application is reviewed?

- **Answer:** Feedback is provided by contacting the Program Officer.

Question: I submitted an LRP application last year and was unsuccessful. Will I receive a summary of areas where the reviewers felt my application was weak?

- **Answer:** The Loan Repayment Program awards contracts, not grants. To receive feedback, the applicant must call and speak with a Program Official.

APPLICATION PROCESS

Question: Where on the website can I locate information regarding expectations for each of the sections (Research Project/Activities, Career Development Plan, Research Environment, and Personal Statement) such as page limits, etc?

- **Answer:** APPLICATION INSTRUCTIONS
https://www.lrp.nih.gov/sites/default/files/docs/pdfs/OAS_Instruction_Guide_FY18_508c.pdf

Question: Based on the definitions on your website who is considered my Research Supervisor? Would this person be the PI for the T32 that I am under for my post-doc or my assigned research mentor? So then, would my research mentor be considered my primary mentor?

- **Answer:** The Research Supervisor is the person who verifies that you are doing the work you committed to do in your LRP application. That person could be the PI for the T32 or your research mentor and could be considered your primary mentor.

Question: Who is an institutional business official? This is a required field and I do not see my University listed, therefore, I checked "Other". It seems as though mostly medical centers are listed. My institution

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is an academic institution. Would the contact person be someone from my School's grants office or the director of the financial office?

- **Answer:** The institutional business official is the person in the Sponsored Projects office responsible for signing off on all applications submitted by the institution.

Question: For renewal applications, should letters of recommendation also focus on progress during first award period?

- **Answer:** Recommendations for renewal applications MUST focus on progress during the first award period and explicitly address publications and grant proposals submitted whether they were successful.

MENTORED VS. INDEPENDENT

Question: How necessary is to have a mentor? How necessary is it for that mentor to have NIH funding? How necessary is it for that mentor to be at your home institution/university? Lastly, in your discipline?

- **Answer:** If the applicant has not received an R level grant of at least \$100,000, they must have a mentorship team. At least 1 mentor must have a history of NIH funding and at least 1 mentor must be published in health disparities research. Members of the mentorship team must have clearly defined roles as to how they will support the applicant in developing an independent NIH funded health disparities research career.

Question: Am I accurate in my understanding of a mentored research scientist versus an independent researcher in considering my role as a post-doctoral fellow to be a mentored research scientist?

- **Answer:** Yes, that is accurate. A researcher is not independent until he/she is PI on an R level grant or receives external funding of more than \$100,000/year.

Question: If I received a research supplement several years ago, as a postdoc (exceeding \$100,000) but am currently not a PI but work more in a research administrative role, am I still considered independent?

- **Answer:** The PI on an administrative supplement is the PI of the parent grant to which the applicant was a supplement. If the applicant was not the PI on the parent grant and has not received an R level grant of at least \$100,000, he/she is not considered independent. The applicant must be engaged in minority health or health disparity research to be eligible for the NIMHD LRP.

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MENTORS

Question: How many mentors do you need when applying for the LRP?

- **Answer:** There is no requirement for a specific number of mentors; however, a mentorship team is an important contributor to successful career development. We recommend that, as with a K (career development) award, applicants develop a mentorship team to work with them in specific areas they determine to be crucial to career development. Mentor strengths should complement each other and the applicant should address that complementarity in the mentorship plan along with a clear, detailed and specific timeline of when meetings will take place and dates for deliverables. Training or mentoring plan (when appropriate) should include a detailed discussion of the training or mentoring plan, including a discussion of the research methods and scientific techniques to be taught.

Question: Do all mentors have to be NIH funded? Is an applicant still competitive if mentors are funded from other organizations besides NIH?

- **Answer:** All mentors do not have to have NIH funding. An applicant with mentors funded by other organizations can still be successful; however, the purpose of the program is to support scholars to become independently funded NIH researchers. Therefore, it is important that at least 1 mentor have NIH funding.

Question: Do all mentors have to be health disparities researchers?

- **Answer:** All mentors do not have to be health disparities researchers. However, the purpose of the program is to support scholars to become independent Health Disparities researchers. Therefore, it is important that at least 1 mentor have publications relevant to Health Disparities.

Question: What specific information are you looking for from mentors, in terms of how they plan to help the applicant?

- **Answer:** The applicant should discuss the mentors' record in mentoring researchers, funding history, and research productivity. Mentors should know the applicant well enough to comment on the research skills and the abilities of the applicant. This includes the applicants' research supervisor or most recent mentor and includes the following:
 - Rate the applicant with respect to previous training and experience to prepare for a research career
 - Commitment to a career in Health Disparities research
 - Potential for a successful career in Health Disparities research
 - Applicant's research related strengths and weaknesses
 - Overall recommendation

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Question: For mentored applicants, are we required to report the source of funding if we are funded by the department or our PI's grant? Can we leave the funding section unanswered if we are mentored applicants?

- **Answer:** Whether mentored or independent, the applicant must state the source of funding for the research. The LRP contract does not support research; therefore, how the research is supported must be addressed.

Question: Since only 3 recommenders are required this year, is it better to have recommenders who are senior level faculty and NIH funded vs. a colleague who you have several publications with, but who is junior faculty?

- **Answer:** Mentors and recommenders must have the experience necessary to assist the applicant in developing a career trajectory to become an independent health disparity researcher.

Question: As part of the personal statement, how much of it should focus on past research experiences versus short term academic and research goals?

- **Answer:** It is important to balance the focus of the personal statement to emphasize what has been done, what is being done and what will be done to develop a career as an independently NIH funded health disparities researcher.

Question: Will we receive notification if any information is requested from the institutional officer, mentor, etc.?

- **Answer:** It is the applicant's responsibility to ensure that all required information is included in the application packet. No notification will be given if information is omitted but the application may be withdrawn as incomplete.

Question: My mentor (PI) is at my institution but I will also train with a mentor at another university by spending some time training in their lab. Is this acceptable?

- **Answer:** Applicants are encouraged to work with mentors both within and outside of their home institution. It is important to clearly and specifically articulate how the mentorship team members complement each other in supporting the applicant's career development. A concrete timeline with frequency of meetings and specific deliverables are an important tool in discussing the mentorship and career development plans.

Question: How necessary is to have a mentor? How necessary is it for that mentor to have NIH funding? How necessary is it for that mentor to be at your home institution/university? Lastly, in your discipline?

- **Answer:** If the applicant has not received an R level grant of at least \$100,000, they must have a mentorship team. At least 1 mentor must have a history of NIH funding and at least 1 mentor must be published in health disparities research. Members of the mentorship team must have clearly defined roles as to how they will support the applicant in developing an independent NIH funded health disparities research career.

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EMPLOYMENT

Question: I understand that a researcher is eligible for the LRP if they work 50% as an employee for a non-profit organization. However, they become ineligible if they receive any research funds or any type of salary from a for-profit organization.

- **Answer:** All applicants must be employed by a domestic, non-profit organization (such as University or Hospital). Additionally, the funding source (such as a grant) supporting the applicant's research project must also be from a domestic, non-profit organization (such as a government entity or foundation). Applicants may work part or full time, but must engage in qualified research for a minimum of 20 hours per week (as an average) each quarter for the duration of their LRP contract.

An applicant that is either employed by or receives research support funding from a for-profit organization (such as a biotech or pharmaceutical company) is ineligible for an LRP award.

Question: If I am serving in the role of director for a non-profit health disparities organization, and manage several research projects, am I eligible for this opportunity?

- **Answer:** The purpose of the LRP is to support scholars to become independently NIH funded health disparity researchers. A director or manager of research projects who is not involved directly as a researcher is not eligible to apply to the LRP.

Question: If this is correct, are there any circumstances where exceptions have been granted? Is there any way I could be a p-t employee of this non-profit (which meets the criteria) and receive some income from my consulting?

- **Answer:** There is no mechanism for a waiver or exemption from the required employment with a non-profit organization.

ELIGIBILITY: LOANS

Question: I thought I had read Perkins loans are not included.

- **Answer:** Perkins loans are included as eligible loans for the Loan Repayment Loan as long as they have not been consolidated with other prohibited loans.

Question: Do we not need to submit promissory notes anymore? Only the loan account statement?

- **Answer:** Promissory Notes are still required. If an applicant is unable to get a Promissory Note, additional Disclosure Statements/Disbursement Reports will be required to satisfy the promissory note requirement.

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ELIGIBILITY: INDIVIDUALS

Question: Can individuals with a Master's degree qualify for the program?

- **Answer:** To qualify for both NIMHD Loan Repayment programs, a doctorate degree is required.

Question: How should we decide which project should be the LRP-Eligible project? Should the LRP-eligible project be those projects that are already-funded? Or, can they be projects that are proposals under review?

- **Answer:** Appropriate research projects for the LRP funding period must be already funded research. There is no guarantee that proposals under review will be selected for funding and are therefore not appropriate for inclusion in an LRP application.

Question: When submitting a project that is a secondary data analysis that is supported by salary and start-up funds (but not an NIH grant), it is appropriate to apply as an independent researcher?

- **Answer:** Unless the applicant has been awarded an R level grant as PI of \$100,000 or more, he/she must submit a mentored application.

Question: Is it possible to receive an LRP if you work at a teaching institution vs. a research institution? Do you know approximately what percentage of applicants at teaching institutions have received the LRP?

- **Answer:** It is possible to receive an LRP if you work at a teaching institution vs. a research institution; however, the applicant must work harder to create an appropriate supportive research environment to support the development of an independent NIH funded health disparity research career. Mentors do not have to be at the home institution

Question: Do the loans need to be in "repayment"? What if I have a one-year grace period?

- **Answer:** Loans do not have to be in repayment but they do need to be in good standing.

Question: Do I still qualify if I have an NIA diversity supplement?

- **Answer:** Yes.