



A Message from the Director

October 2014



Development of a New Funding Plan: The Expanded Opportunity Zone

Dear NIBIB Research Community,

In a prior newsletter, I described the challenge we have faced since 2010 of an approximate 80% increase in the number of applications that score within the 10th percentile. This has also occurred during a period of flat to slightly declining budgets. While we are proud that NIBIB has received a substantially larger number of very high quality applications, indicating the scientific growth of our community, our nominal payline has consequently decreased to about half that of its peak in 2009, the 19th percentile. Thus many outstanding applications have not been funded in recent years. More specifically applications with scores between the 10th and 19th percentiles, which would have been funded 5 years ago, have largely not been considered for funding.

To address this issue, and to do so within our current budgetary limits, an experimental funding plan has been designed. This plan was unveiled at the fall 2014 meeting of the NIBIB National Advisory Council. It considers all applications with scores within a zone that covers 2X the projected payline, where this payline is estimated at the start of the fiscal year. The zone between the projected payline and twice that payline has been dubbed the “expanded opportunity zone” (EOZ). The intent is to fund (1) the applications that have scores within the projected payline, and (2) a percentage of those that have scores within the expanded opportunity zone using a fraction of our funds set aside for this purpose and any end of year funds.

The pilot for this new “Payline +” funding plan, utilizing the EOZ, is summarized in the table to the right. It shows that this past fiscal year we funded the applications with priority scores within the projected payline, plus a percentage of applications with scores that were within the EOZ. In FY 2014 the projected payline was the 9th percentile. We also considered for end of year funding the applications that scored within the 10th through the 18th percentile. Fortunately, available funds, after paying those within the 9th percentile, allowed us to fund approximately 25% of the applications that fell within the EOZ. This means that applications which scored from the 10th to the 18th percentiles were not automatically excluded from pay consideration, but instead had a one in four chance of being funded.

The factors considered for selecting applications in the EOZ for funding include (1) scientific program priority/alignment with the strategic plan/ likelihood of sustained impact, (2) research uniqueness and innovation, (3) career stage of the investigator, (4) investigators from under-represented groups, and (5) current level of investigator funding. The final determination is based on our internal assessment of these factors and the available funds.

We hope this new policy will identify and subsequently fund the applications that promise to be most effective in helping the NIBIB meet its mission. This new funding plan embraces recent data that indicates applications with priority scores within the 20th percentile are indistinguishable in regards to their eventual impact on the field as assessed by citation indexes¹. This, of course, does not return us to the funding levels of five years ago. However, it is our hope that investigators who write outstanding applications will appreciate that such applications will get funding consideration even when the percentile score is beyond the current projected payline but still within the EOZ. As NIBIB Director, I am proud to lead a team of dedicated people who work hard to understand and address our communities’ challenges. We strive to support the superb work our scientists undertake to improve the health of our nation.

Sincerely,

Roderic I. Pettigrew, PhD, MD
Director, National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering

¹Danthe N, Wu CO, Shi P, Lauer M. Percentile ranking and citation impact of a large cohort of national heart, lung, and blood institute-funded cardiovascular ro1 grants. *Circ Res.* 2014 Feb 14;114(4):600-6)

New Funding Plan Pilot: “Payline +”
Payline + Expanded Opportunity Zone →
 $\leq 2X$ Nominal Payline for R01s/R21s
 (FY '14 Zone = Percentile Between 10-18)

Selection Criteria:
 Likely to exert a sustained powerful influence on the field;
 Scientific & Demographic Program priority; High Innovation

EOZ Pilot Awards

Number of R01/R21 Expanded Zone Awards	30
Number of R01/R21 Expanded Zone Applications	118
Percentage of Expanded Zone Applications Funded	25%

NIH National Institute of Biomedical Imaging and Bioengineering nibib.nih.gov