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OFFICE OF INTRAMURAL TRAINING & EDUCATION • 2 CENTER DRIVE • BUILDING 2, SECOND FLOOR • BETHESDA, MD 20892-0240 • 301 496 2427  
The NIH is dedicated to building a diverse community in its training and employment programs.

## **TIPS AND GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A COMPETITIVE INTRAMURAL LOAN REPAYMENT (ILRP) APPLICATION**

All NIH full-time equivalent (FTE) researchers who meet the ILRP eligibility criteria are encouraged to submit an application. Interested applicants should visit the Web site, [www.lrp.nih.gov](http://www.lrp.nih.gov). Successful applicants take great care to create an application that presents their work and dedication to research well. Make sure you allow adequate time to develop your application and use the LRP Information Center. The guidelines below highlight important suggestions for writing a competitive application:

- 1. Effectively demonstrate your qualifications and commitment to research.** Do not sell yourself short in your Biosketch. Highlight your research awards; successful appointments; grant(s); internal and external collaborations with other researchers, institutes, countries, or organizations; and scientific and professional society awards and participation. The ultimate goal is to present yourself as a successful scientist. Include all research experiences, at each phase of your education. List presentations at scientific symposia and workshops, as well as all published research. The ILRP Scientific Review Committee is aware that some applicants, particularly those with medical and clinical degrees, may have a smaller number of publications because research was not the primary focus of their training. Nevertheless, you should highlight your commitment to research.
- 2. Develop a strong research plan.** Focus on developing a great research plan/project that falls within the scientific mission of the Institute/Center where the research will be conducted. Write clearly and include a solid introduction, your research goals and specific aims, the methods and research design you propose to use, and a discussion of the results you hope to obtain and possible experimental pitfalls. Outline your specific contribution to the design, implementation and analysis of the research and your role in the project/plan. Will you develop the clinical protocol or be the first author on resulting publications? Is this independent research or a team/collaborative research effort? Aim for a research plan that is innovative; solicit input from your mentor(s) to ensure this is the case. If the review team does not regard your research plan as innovative, your chances of acquiring an ILRP award will be greatly diminished. Applicants for renewal should make a special effort to include discussions of: (1) the research that was completed during the prior year; (2) the applicant's accomplishments; (3) the focus of the current research plan; and (4) the applicant's commitment to a career that includes research, whether it is in an academic, private industry, or federal/state agency research setting. Discuss any awards, grants or positions for which you intend to apply during the year. Indicate any proposed changes in mentor, lab, or position.
- 3. Review your application carefully.** Make sure that you have someone, preferably your mentor, read your application prior to its submission. Proofread for content, grammar, typographical errors, and style. Practice your oral presentation with your mentor and/or professional colleagues. (NOTE: renewal applicants will not make an oral presentation. This means that you must be particularly careful to think through and address in the application potential questions the reviewers might have regarding the

project.) In addition, applicants should indicate any mentor, lab or position changes. If writing is difficult for you, consider taking steps to improve your written language skills prior to drafting the application.

4. **Indicate the timeframe needed to initiate and complete the proposed research project(s).** For example, what will be the focus of the research in year-one versus year- two or year- three? Be specific about the amount of time you will spend conducting the research, particularly if you have other responsibilities. If you are proposing multiple projects, be specific about what you will implement. Keep in mind when you are writing, that it must be feasible to complete the proposed research project within the two-year timeframe specified by the Clinical Research ILRP for Individuals from Disadvantaged Backgrounds or AIDS Research or the three-year timeframe provided General Research or ACGME ILRP applicants or the one-year renewal timeframe allotted to renewals.
5. **Collaborate and involve your mentor(s).** Because many ILRP applicants are in the early stages of their careers, they are in mentored positions. Consult with your mentor before submitting the application. The Research Training Environment section should be submitted and written by your mentor/supervisor. Work with your mentor(s) to ensure that the mentoring plan accurately reflects all of the support you have available for your research. If you have more than one mentor, clearly define the role each mentor will play.
6. **Provide strong letters of recommendation.** Make sure your letters of recommendation are well-written. Choose mentors and senior colleagues who are very familiar with your work. You will want them to be able to cast your skills as a researcher and commitment to research in the best possible light. You should impress upon the recommenders that the ILRP is a competitive program and ask that they take time to respond comprehensively to the questions. Providing a one or two sentence response is generally not adequate. If you are a junior researcher and have a limited publication record, ask your references to address that fact and to emphasize your enthusiasm, diligence, and any other quality that denotes commitment to a research career. Make sure you give your references adequate time to prepare their letters.
7. **Ensure a positive impression.** Because ILRP reviewers are looking at your overall research potential, they form their opinion by using all of the above points. Make certain all the elements of your application work together to improve your chances of receiving loan repayment.

### **Common Reasons Why LRP Applications Are Not Funded**

1. Weak or lukewarm letters of recommendation
2. Questionable research commitment. Sometimes, reviewers don't get a sense of the applicant's commitment to research. This occurs frequently with junior applicants. If your accomplishments are limited, make sure your application reflects your strong commitment to research and that the letters of recommendation attest to this.
3. Mediocre research plan and written language skills

4. Rushed application. While the application process is straightforward and the LRP Information Center (866.849.4047) is available to aid applicants up until the deadline, last minute submissions are not a good idea and tend to fare poorly.
5. Inadequate research environment that is not conducive to the applicant's research aspirations
6. A poor publication record without explanation

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