National Institutes of Health (NIH) is one of the world’s largest public research funding agencies. This brief will help you: (1) learn the difference between three common types of NIH grants, (2) understand the NIH review process, and (3) learn the basics of constructing a NIH proposal.

**Part 1: Choosing a Funding Program**

NIH is made up of 27 Institutes and Centers (ICs), each with their own mission, but they share funding opportunity announcements. The three most common and relevant to education-related research are R03, R21, and R01. Before pursuing an R01, consider starting with an R03 or R21 to generate preliminary research that will support a competitive R01.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Small Grant Program (R03)</th>
<th>Exploratory/Developmental Research Grant Award (R21)</th>
<th>Research Project Grant Program (R01)</th>
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</table>
| • Provides limited funding to support a variety of project types (e.g., pilot/feasibility studies; preliminary data collection; secondary data analysis; small, self-contained research projects; developing new research technology) | • Encourages new, exploratory, developmental research projects by supporting the early stages of project development  
• Sometimes used for pilot and feasibility studies  
• Timeline: two years  
• Budget: $275k total combined directs  
• Not renewable  
• Utilized by most ICs | • Used to support a discrete, specified, circumscribed research project  
• NIH’s most commonly used grant program  
• Timeline: generally 3-5 years  
• Budget: no limit; advance permission required for high budgets  
• Renewable  
• Utilized by all ICs |

**Part 2: Understanding the NIH Review Process**

NIH conducts two rounds of peer review:

| Initial Peer Review/Scientific Review Groups | Focus: Assessment of scientific and technical merit  
Reviewers: A Scientific Review Group (SRG) with people with relevant scientific discipline expertise |
|---------------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------|
| Advisory Council/Board Review               | Focus: Make recommendations on priority areas of research, pending policy, and finding or particular applications  
Reviewers: Scientific members and public representatives based on expertise, interest, or activity in related matters |

Proposals are scored based on five review criteria. Three of these criteria align with the three sections of your research strategy (described in Part 3):

1. **Significance**
2. **Investigator(s)**
3. **Innovation**
4. **Approach**
5. **Environment**

Read [this article](#) for some insider information about how references affect your scores.
Part 3: Writing a NIH Grant Proposal

All NIH applications contain five standard sections, described below. Other sections may be required but are specific to the application type or FOA.

### Project Summary/Abstract (30 lines)
A succinct, accurate description of the proposed work; written in third person.

### Project Narrative (3 sentences)
Relevance of the research to public health. When funded, this will be combined with the project summary and become public information.

### Specific Aims (1 page)
Concise summary of the goals and expected outcome(s), including the impact on the research field(s) involved and a succinct list of research objectives.

### Research Strategy (R03 & R21 – 6 pages; R01–12 pages)
Describes the proposed research; always uses the following three headings:
1. Significance: importance of the problem or barrier to progress; lit review
2. Innovation: competitive analysis
3. Approach: hypothesis, methods, preliminary data, impact, aims, and expected results

### Biosketches (5 pages each)
All senior/key personnel and other significant contributors must submit a biosketch. NIH biosketches include some personal information followed by four sections:
- Personal Statement
- Positions and Honors
- Contributions to Science
- Additional Information: Research Support and/or Scholastic Performance

(See a sample biosketch)

Follow these dos and don'ts when formatting and writing your application:
- ✔ ½" margins
- ✔ 11 pt font or larger
- ✔ Arial, Georgia, Helvetica, or Palatino Linotype
- ✔ single spaced
- ✔ spell out acronyms on first use
- ✗ jargon
- ✗ headers or footers
- ✗ page numbers
- ✗ URLs (with some exceptions)

View a series of grant writing webinars by Meg Bouvier, a NIH consultant. Contact RODA for a discount code to bypass the billing system.