

SPECIAL SERIES: INSIDER PERSPECTIVES ON THE FUNDING REVIEW PROCESS

## *Introduction*

# Looking Inside the Black Box: Insider Perspectives on the Funding Review Process

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When junior academics within AABT think about career advancement, it is increasingly common for them to think about gaining some type of extramural support for their research. But for those attempting funding for the first time, applying for support can be a daunting task. There are many different types of funding mechanisms and many different agencies ready to support the research that is of interest to AABT's membership. This diversity is good because it provides a variety of avenues for successful grant applications. At the same time, this diversity can arouse anxiety among junior academics who may be less seasoned in the funding process. To address the needs and concerns of this important group within AABT, the Committee for Research Agenda of AABT sponsored two panel discussions on research funding at the 35th annual convention of the association.

The first panel was comprised of program officers from major funding agencies: Lisa Onken representing the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA), Bob Heinssen representing the National Institute of Mental Health (NIMH), and Ileana Arias representing the Center for Disease Control (CDC). The program officers presented information about funding mechanisms, points of contact with funding agencies, and, most importantly, encouragement to contact and communicate with program officers to receive help in the process of grant writing. A central theme of the presentations was that federal agencies are very interested in facilitating the development of new investigators and that program officials are ready to help those applying for funding.

The second panel was comprised of three experienced members of NIH review panels: Dianne Chambless, Steve Hollon, and Phil Kendall. These three long-time AABT leaders provided an insider's look at the various mechanisms of support, what happens to grants after they are submitted, the criteria by which they are reviewed, and numerous tips about

how to maximize the fundability of treatment grant proposals. Several overarching themes were evident across the presentations. First, there are many sources of support and many types of support (see especially the article by Kendall and Coles, p. 254). So, there is likely to be a type of support that fits your circumstances. Second, the criteria by which proposals are evaluated can be articulated in clear language that provides guidance to those submitting proposals, and the most important individual characteristic predictive of funding is persistence, with revisions being necessary for funding in most cases (see especially Chambless, p. 258). Finally, for treatment research, the grant process does not stop with initial approval, so it behooves aspiring clinical researchers to understand the mechanisms involved in patient protection and the very issues that need to be dealt with to ensure patient safety (see Hollon, p. 261). This special section of *tBT* is meant to summarize the presentations of Drs. Chambless, Hollon, and Kendall and so to disseminate more broadly this important information to aspiring clinical scientists in AABT. In the pages that follow, these three experienced reviewers provide a wealth of information in a brief and useful format. 