

MERIDIANS

The Journal of
Acupuncture and
Oriental Medicine

A Guide to Funding from the National Institutes of Health

By Jennifer A. M. Stone, LAc

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) manages funding for a variety of biomedical and clinical research projects. For many years, the only office funding acupuncture and Oriental medicine (AOM) research was the National Center for Complementary and Alternative Medicine (NCCAM). Much has changed in the past 25 years. Due to an increased amount of acupuncture research reporting positive findings, additional NIH offices are funding acupuncture research, such as the National Cancer Institute (NCI), the National Institute of Aging (NIA), and the National Institute of Arthritis and Musculoskeletal and Skin Diseases (NIAMS).

In 2014, NCCAM changed their name to align with the growing trend of use of the word “integrative.” They are now known as the National Center for Complementary and Integrative Health (NCCIH). NCCIH and other NIH offices award funding for many AOM modalities in addition to acupuncture, such as Chinese and western herbs, yoga, meditation, etc.

<https://nccih.nih.gov/>

What Costs Does an NIH Grant Cover?

Major research institutions get most of their operating capital from federal funding. The research institution is the grantee for most grant awards. The institution houses the funds in their grants account management office. Some awards will pay for a percentage of the principal investigator’s salary if they are a paid faculty member of the institution.

Most grants provide funding for both direct and indirect costs. A **direct cost** is any cost that can be easily identified with a specific project (grant/contract): e.g., salaries and wages, materials and supplies, subcontracts, consultants. An **indirect cost** is any cost that cannot be easily identified (or it would not be cost effective to identify) to a specific project, but it is identified with two or more final cost objectives. There are three types of indirect costs:

- Fringe Benefits: services or benefits provided to employees, e.g., health insurance, payroll taxes, pension contribution, paid absences, etc.
- Overhead: indirect costs associated with the performance of a project, e.g., facility costs (rent, heat, electricity, etc.), general laboratory supplies, etc.
- Governance and Administration: indirect costs associated with the overall management of an organization, e.g., the president’s office, human resources office, accounting office, and general office supplies

Each institution has its own calculation for indirect costs, and each funding mechanism provides different amounts for indirect costs. At Indiana University, for example, for most research and development grants, the institution receives over 50% for indirect costs. For each \$100K that is awarded for a project, the institution receives an *additional* \$50K+ to cover indirect costs.

General Award Mechanisms Used by NCCIH and Other NIH Offices:

Research Project Grants:

- R03 Small Grant
This mechanism will support small research projects that can be carried out in a short period of time with limited resources. Example: \$50,000 per year for two years
- R21 Exploratory/Development Grants
These grants are designed to encourage the development of new research activities in categorical program areas, such as pilot studies and feasibility studies, usually for a duration of two years. The combined budget for direct costs for the two year project period usually may not exceed \$275,000.
- R01 Research Project
Following an R21, an investigator might qualify for a 3-5 year R01 to conduct a much larger study in a larger population. There is no cost limit, but special permission is needed for projects costing more than \$500,000 per year.
- R15 Academic Research Enhancement Awards (AREA)
These awards support small-scale research projects conducted by faculty primarily in baccalaureate degree-granting domestic institutions and institutions that are otherwise unlikely to participate extensively in NIH programs in biomedical and behavioral research. Awards are given for up to \$150,000 for direct costs (plus applicable indirect costs) for periods not to exceed 36 months.
- R34 Clinical Trial Planning Grant
These grants are designed to permit early peer review of the rationale for the proposed clinical trial and support development of essential elements of a clinical trial, usually with a budget of up to \$100,000 direct costs, sometimes up to \$450,000, for 1-3 years.

This is a limited list; more information can found at:

http://grants.nih.gov/grants/funding/funding_program.htm

Grants for Pre- and Post-Doctoral Individuals

To help fund pre- and post-doctoral student salaries:

- F31 Pre-doctoral Individual: Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award
- F32 Post-doctoral Individual: Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award

Career Development and Training Awards

To fund research training for PhDs, DAOMs and faculty:

- K01 Research Scientist Development Award—Research and Training
- K07 Academic/Teacher Award (ATA)
- K08 Clinical Investigator Award (CIA)
- K23 Mentored Patient-Oriented Research Career Development Award
- K24 Midcareer Investigator Award in Patient-Oriented Research
- K99/R00 NIH Pathway to Independence (PI) Award
- T32 Institutional Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award
- T35 Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award Short-Term Research Training
- T90/R90 Interdisciplinary Research Training Award/Interdisciplinary Regular Research Training Award

Conference Awards

To support recipient-sponsored and -directed international, national, or regional meetings, conferences, and workshops:

- R13 Conference (prior approval required)

Small Business Awards

To fund collaborative research and development between small businesses and research institutions (example: implement a new computer system in a hospital for medical coding):

- R41 Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) Grants—Phase I
- R42 Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) Grants—Phase II
- R43 Small Business Innovation Research Grants (SBIR)—Phase I
- R44 Small Business Innovation Research Grants (SBIR)—Phase II

Active Funding Announcements (PAs, RFAs and RFPs)

An active funding announcement is a publicly available document by which a federal agency makes known its intention to award discretionary grants or cooperative agreements, usually as a result of competition for funds. Funding opportunity announcements may be known as program announcements (PA), requests for applications (RFA), requests for proposals (RFP), notices of funding availability, solicitations, or other names depending on the agency and type of program. Funding opportunity announcements can be found at [Grants.gov/FIND](https://www.grants.gov/FIND) and in the [NIH Guide for Grants and Contracts](#).

NCCIH-supported funding opportunities can be found at: <https://nccih.nih.gov/grants/funding>

Who Is Eligible for an NIH Grant?

Each type of NIH grant program has its own set of eligibility requirements. Applicants can find eligibility information in Section III of each funding opportunity announcement (PA, RFA, RFP). While the principal investigator (PI) conceives and writes the application, NIH recognizes the **applicant institution** as the

grantee for most grant types. In general, domestic or foreign, public or private, non-profit or for-profit organizations are eligible to receive NIH grants.

How to Apply

Most grant applications are submitted through eRA Commons, the electronic Research Administration. <http://era.nih.gov/>

NIH's eRA systems provide applicants, grantees, and federal staff the tools necessary for electronic processing of grants. Used by NIH, AHRQ, CDC, FDA, SAMHSA and the VA, the eRA Commons and IMPACT II systems support the full grants life cycle from receipt to award to closeout.

The eRA Commons website handles registration for institutions submitting. Grants are submitted through eRA Commons and the progress of the grant is tracked through eRA Commons. The system also tracks the account information of the different funds that each institution is managing. It has instructions and tutorials on registering a new institution and submitting the grant.

General Application Resources

The NCCIH website provides links for general resources, clinical research resources and pre-application events and summaries. They have links to policies, writing tips, deadlines, forms, and more. <https://nccih.nih.gov/grants/resources>

For an overview of grants and funding visit: http://grants.nih.gov/grants/about_grants.htm

Additional Recommendations

Collaborate! Team up with researchers who are already NIH funded and therefore know the system. Contact the program officer (PO) for the PA, RFA or RFP before you apply. The PO's contact information is listed at the bottom of the announcement.

Design and conduct a small feasibility study before you apply for a research grant. The NCCIH wants to see that you can work with the different offices and team members at your institution (researchers, clinicians, research nurses, scientific review committee, IRB, statistics, purchasing, accounting, research coordinators).

Have patience. Most researchers work for several years on other people's research projects before they are awarded their own federal funding for their own project under their own name.