Ask Me Anything
Adapting Proposal and Funding Strategies to Today's NIH Landscape

Please note that the information in this presentation may be subject to change and could be outdated or inaccurate due to recent updates or developments.

March 3rd 2026

Agenda

1. **Introductions**

2. **Talk:** Adapting Proposal and Funding Strategies to Today's NIH Landscape

3. **Q&A**

Atom Grants

Speakers

Raphaël Bernier
Atom Grants
Head of Growth

Jennifer Troyer
Freelance Science Advisor
Former NIH

Atom Grants

Today's NIH

What has changed in the last year?

- Staffing
- Funding priorities
- Funding opportunities
- Applications
- Review
- Funding policies
- Budget

NIH Campus Photo

Congressional authority for the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) programs has expired as of September 30, 2025. If no further action is taken by congress, federal agencies may not be able to award funding under SBIR/STTR programs and SBIR/STTR solicitations may be delayed, cancelled, or rescinded. Current applicants and awardees should reach out directly to participating agencies with questions regarding active awards or applications.

Today's NIH

What remains the same?

Mission

To seek fundamental knowledge about the nature and behavior of living systems and the application of that knowledge to enhance health, lengthen life, and reduce illness and disability.

Overall process

Submission, receipt and referral, review (first and second level), funding decisions, JIT, award, progress reports, renewal or closeout.

Staff dedication

Program staff, review officers, and grant management specialists are still your first-line resources to navigate the system.

Bottom line

Submit good proposals to do good science, talk to your program director, diversify your funding sources, have contingency plans.

Staffing Reductions

Be strategic, persistent, patient, and kind.

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Drivers of Change

- **Staff Reductions:** Driven by RIFs (Reduction in Force), buy-outs, and both regular and early retirements.
- **Operational Shifts:** Personnel losses due to probationary actions and disagreements with new institutional policies or practices.

Impacted Staff

- **Extramural & Admin:** Most losses occurred within extramural programs and administrative support
- **Scientific Leadership:** Over 1,000 PhD scientists, specifically affecting program and review staff.

Targeted Areas

- **Strategic Roles:** Communication, policy, program analysis, and workforce development.
- **Support Services:** Acquisitions, logistics, management analysis, and community involvement.
- **Distribution:** These staffing changes are not evenly distributed across all institutes and Centers (ICs).

Funding Priorities

The Driving Factors

The MAHA Report

A primary influence on current directions.

Restoring Gold Standard Science

A focus on high-quality, rigorous research.

NIH's Unified Funding Strategy

Ensuring a cohesive approach across the NIH.

IC Missions

Tailored focus areas based on specific Institute and Center (IC) mandates.

The MAHA report

Gold Standard Science

Advancing NIH's Mission Through a Unified Strategy

Funding Priorities

Solicited

- New NOFO Publishing Process
- Key Process Changes
  - Fewer NOFOs: Mandated reduction in total volume.
  - Forecasts Required: Must be provided upfront.
  - Expect Delays: HHS approval is now required at all stages.
- How to Find NOFOs
  - No longer published in the NIH Guide.
  - Search via: grants.nih.gov
  - Also available at: simpler.grants.gov

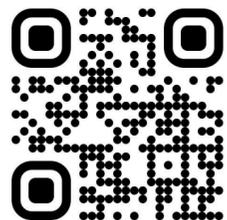How Can I Find Funding Opportunities Now That They Are Not in the NIH Guide?

Funding Priorities

Unsolicited

- Parent Funding Announcements
- Status Update
  - Coming Soon: New parent announcements are on the way.
- Where to Look
  - Main Website: grants.nih.gov
  - Direct Link: grants.nih.gov/funding/explore-nih-opportunities/parent-announcements

NHGRI Example Page:

New Resource: Highlighted Topics

Key Features

New Areas

Opportunities may feature new or emerging areas of interest within the scientific community.

Timeframe

Individual topics will expire after 1 year. NIH may extend.

How to Apply

Apply through NIH Parent Announcements or other broad NIH opportunities.

Discovery

Search topics by keyword and filter by participating ICOs.

Title	Lead ICO	Participating ICOS	Posted Date	Expiration Date
Technology Development for Genomics	NHGRI	NHGRI, NIAID, NIDA, NLM, ORWH	August 29, 2025	August 29, 2026
Advancing the Use of Genomic Information Into Clinical Care	NHGRI	NHGRI, NIAID, NIDA, NINDS, NINR, ORWH	August 29, 2025	August 29, 2025

NIH Highlighted Topics:

Applications

Recent Changes and Policy Updates

New Common Forms

Standardized federal forms are encouraged now and required by May 2026.

Submission Requirements

Read NOFOs carefully as many have changed, including new rules for foreign subawards.

Policy Updates

Review recent updates covering BESH, animal models, AI assisted submissions, and data sharing.

Thoughtful Word Choices

Propose the best science rather than altering your text for perceived banned words.

Advocating for Your Science

Be prepared to renegotiate, appeal, and stand firm when warranted.

Jeremy Berg's Analysis: NIH Grant Title Changes and Award Delays

Review

What has changed?

Simplified Review Framework

Developed before this administration. It changes the review structure and focus rather than the applications and is rolled out for specific activity codes.
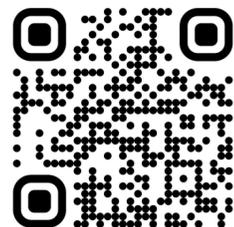
Consolidated Locus of Review

All reviews are now conducted entirely by the Center for Scientific Review rather than individual ICs.

Post Shutdown Contingencies

Rescheduling meetings affects thousands of applications. One third will be discussed and scored while another third will be marked meritorious for potential funding. Simplified summary statements will be provided for discussed applications.

NIH Center for Scientific Review:

Policy Updates

Navigating New Compliance Rules and Restrictions

Compliance Requirements (NOT-OD-26-007)

NIH awards must comply with renegotiated aims, objectives, titles, and abstracts. They must also strictly align with administrative priorities like the NIH Director's Statement of Priorities.

Award Terminations (NOT-OD-26-009)

A new term allows awards to be terminated if they no longer align with program goals or agency priorities.

Administrative Burden Reduction (NOT-OD-26-019)

Letters of Intent are no longer required. Additionally, applicants requesting over $500,000 in direct costs no longer need to contact the funding IC before submission.

Prior Approval Requests (NOT-OD-26-026)

After February 20, all Prior Approval requests must be submitted directly through the eRA Commons Prior Approval Module.

NIH Grants and Funding FAQs:

Blog by Drs. Lorsch and Jorgenson:

Policy Updates ~ Continued

Navigating New Compliance Rules and Restrictions

Fetal Tissue Research (NOT-OD-26-028)

NIH funds will no longer be permitted for research using human fetal tissue.

Basic Experimental Studies Involving Humans

BESH will no longer be subject to the requirements under the NIH Clinical Trial Definition.

Priority of Human Based Research

All new NOFOs that include animal model systems must now also support human focused approaches.

NIH Grants and Funding FAQs:

Blog by Drs. Lorsch and Jorgenson:

Foreign Subawards and Collaborations

Navigating Foreign Subaward Restrictions

Foreign Justification (NOT-OD-25-098)

A justification is now required for all applications involving foreign activities or collaborations.

Current Options for Existing Awards

If your award is affected, you currently have three options:
- Rebudget and transfer the funds to the prime recipient or a domestic subrecipient.
- Remove the subawards entirely, or terminate the award if it is no longer viable without the foreign subaward.
- Restructure the award (NOT-OD-25-130), though this is only an option for awards involving human subjects research.

Foreign Subaward Restrictions (NOT-OD-25-104)

NIH will no longer issue awards that include subawards to foreign entities.

New Application Structure (NOT-OD-25-155)

You must submit applications with foreign components to a NOFO using PF5 for grants, UF5 for cooperative agreements, or specific activity codes that support the International Project component type. Please note that the PF5 activity code was published on January 20, while UF5 is not yet available.

Collaborative International Research...

Policy Updates - Continued

Navigating New Compliance Rules and Restrictions

AI & Data Restrictions

- **No "AI-Written" Grants:** NIH will not consider applications substantially developed by AI.
- **Model Ownership:** If you train AI on NIH genomic data (NOT-OD-25-081), you cannot retain the model or parameters after the project ends.
- **DMS Plan Update:** Effective for due dates on or after May 25, 2026, applicants must use a new, simpler format page (NOT-OD-26-046).

New Submission Limits

- **The "6-Pack" Rule:** Maximum of 6 applications per year per PI/PD across all council rounds.
- **Public Access:** Mandatory public sharing of all results starts July 1 (NOT-OD-25-101).

Safety & Transparency

- **Gain of Function:** Strict ban on dangerous pathogen enhancement; ongoing research faces potential suspension (NOT-OD-25-112).
- **Public Oversight (NOT-OD-25-082):** Institutional Biosafety Committee rosters and meeting minutes must now be publicly posted by the institution.

Budget 2026

Title	FY 2025 Enacted L-HHS Appropriation	FY 2026 President's Budget	FY 2026 Enacted L-HHS Appropriation
NIH	$47 B	$27.9 B	$47.5 B

Increased Level Of Multi-year funding (MYF)

Funding Structure

Fully funded at the start of the project period from a single fiscal year appropriation rather than subsequent budget years.

Project Timeline

The maximum project period is four years. The potential for no cost extensions or supplements remains unclear.

Congressional Caps
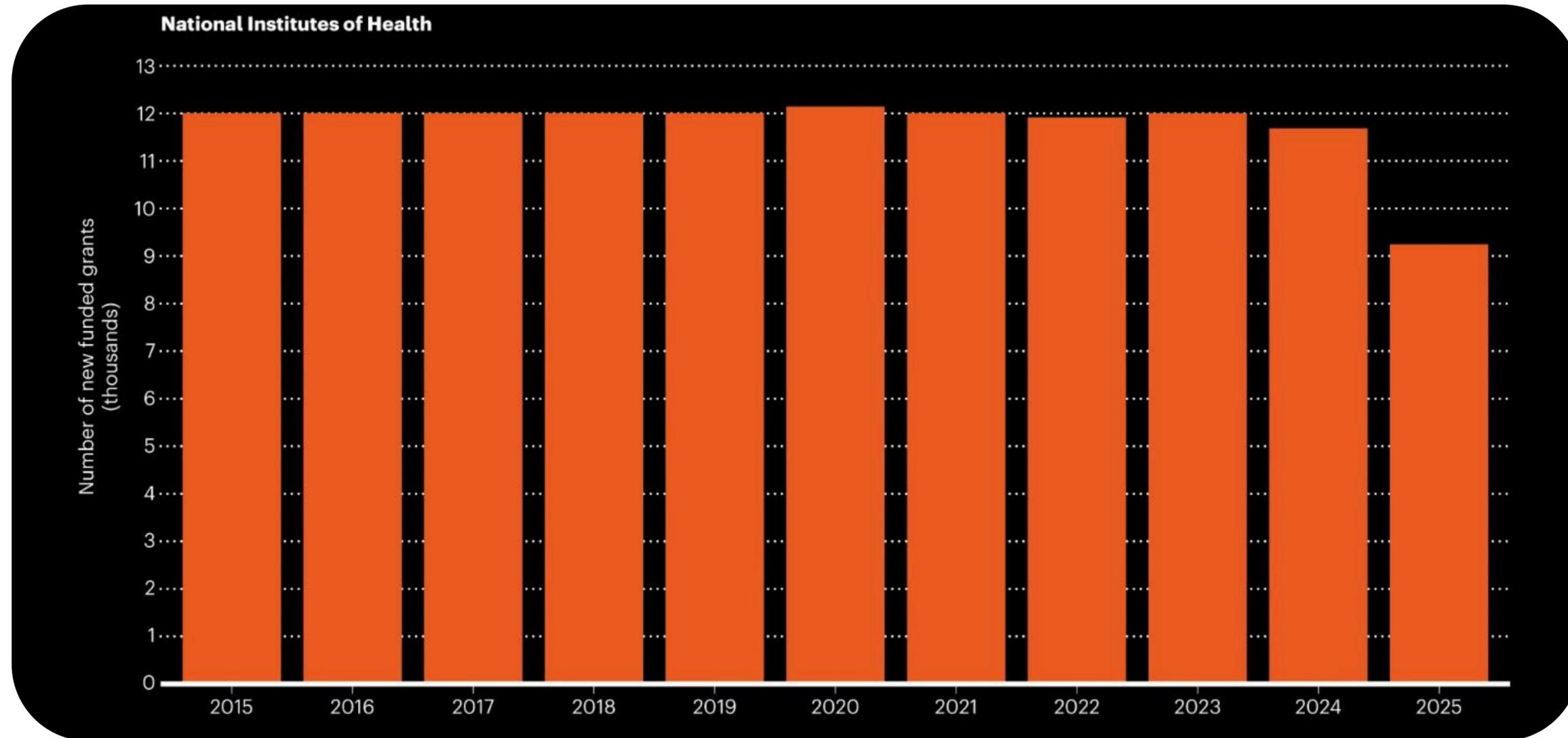
Capped at FY25 levels by Congress. This results in fewer awards and researchers supported for longer periods due to OMB requirements.

Reporting Requirements

Multi year funding still requires yearly progress reports or RPPRs.

Budget

The Decline in New Funded Grants (2015–2025)

National Institutes of Health

Number of new funded grants (thousands)

Take Home Messages

Navigating change and uncertainty.

Current Challenges

- **Staff & Communication:** Shortages are leading to an overall decrease in communication.
- **Decision Making:** Shifts in the locus of decision making are resulting in a lack of clarity.
- **Tight Budgets:** Financial constraints are leading to fewer awards being funded.

The Evolving Landscape

- **Policy Shifts:** Prepare for an evolving landscape with many ongoing changes to processes and policies.
- **Long-Term Outlook:** Not all changes are bad. Some will improve things in the long run, despite short-term confusion and chaos.

Actionable Strategies

- **Advocacy:** If changes impact you negatively, talk to your representatives in Congress. Appeals and lawsuits have also proven successful.
- **The Bottom Line:** Submit good proposals for good science, talk to your program director, diversify funding sources, and have contingency plans.

Thank you!

Ask Me Anything

Book a demo today if you want to:

- Get a First Look: The Proposal Development Module
- Secure Early Access
- Shape the Roadmap: Provide Feedback

✉ jen.l.troyer@gmail.com
✉ raphael@atomgrants.com

👆 Scan to meet with our team
or head to **atomgrants.com**

Simplified Review Framework

All considered in Overall Impact Score

Process Update: Changes apply to the structure and focus of review, not the application itself.

Status: All relevant NOFOs have been updated.

Scope: Affects select activity codes only.

Activity Code Info:

Factor 1: Importance of the Research

- **Key Focus:** Significance and Innovation.
- **Evaluation:** Reviewers assess the core impact and novelty of the proposed science.
- **Scoring:** Given an individual score on a scale of 1–9.

Factor 2: Rigor and Feasibility

- **Key Focus:** The scientific Approach.
- **Requirements:** Must include "Inclusions" and a "Study Timeline" for all clinical trials.
- **Scoring:** Given an individual score on a scale of 1–9.

Factor 3: Expertise and Resources

- **Key Focus:** Investigators and the Research Environment.
- **Evaluation:** Rated as "Appropriate" or "Gaps Identified" (which require a detailed explanation).
- **Scoring:** No individual score; however, it is heavily considered in the Overall Impact Score.