



Future of Research calls on the NIH to reconsider abandoning its plans to cap NIH funding for individual investigators

On June 7th, 2017, Future of Research (FoR) issued a statement (<https://tinyurl.com/yahvps79>) supporting the National Institutes of Health's proposal to limit grant support by implementing the Grant Support Index (GSI). On June 8th, 2017, at the Advisory Council to the Director, NIH Director Dr. Francis Collins announced that the cap proposal would be dropped in favor of the Next Generation Researcher's Initiative (<https://tinyurl.com/ydaxm3b4>), which instead will call for reassignment of funds at each individual institutes towards early and mid-career investigators. Juan Pablo Ruiz, a graduate student at NIH, expressed the junior research community's disappointment in the discussion (see <https://tinyurl.com/y8usocwp> from 4:11:54 to 4:23:38).

We are extremely disappointed at the sudden abandonment of discussion of the proposed cap on funding. Despite assurances to the contrary, it appears that the concerns of a small minority of well-funded investigators were disproportionately instrumental in the decision to cancel discussion of the proposal.

First, the Councils themselves at NIH have a limited ability to hear from early and mid-career investigators, due to their lack of participation, and this introduces a limitation on hearing concerns of all groups who should have been central to this discussion, rather than having over-representation of well-funded investigators.

Second, as M. Roy Wilson, President of Wayne State University, pointed out in the discussion at the Advisory Council to the Director's meeting, "I was stunned by a few of the letters that seemed very self-interested...the language used was, I would say, more than vociferous, in some cases inappropriate, and was not well-reasoned...I was shocked by some of them...if the students or the postdocs or the other young investigators saw any of these letters...(and as Juan Pablo Ruiz replies, "We saw some of them") I would understand why they might feel a little bit like they probably do feel." The rhetoric that has been used by well-funded investigators in this discussion has been both self-serving, and dismissive of the calibre of other scientists. For example, Doug Melton likened the policy to promoting the use of "the second string," in a Boston Globe article (<https://tinyurl.com/y878hto2>).

We do not feel it is appropriate for well-funded investigators to be entitled to funding in the face of many pieces of evidence pointing to inefficiencies that result from our current funding disparities. This is especially the case when hyper-competition for funding and the continued increase in the number of junior scientists being produced by this trainee-dependent research system, means that there are many scientists being excluded from entering or remaining within the system. The nation's interests are not best served by indulging the few, when so much research potential is being lost.

We are also disappointed to see that no assessment of human capital, mentoring ability, or training outcomes for the junior scientists in labs will be incorporated into the NIH's assessment. One of the many pieces of data suggesting inefficiencies at NIH showed that investigators with more funding do not in general produce more early stage investigators (slide 26: <https://tinyurl.com/y8uo2wbk>). If this is the Next Generation of Researchers Initiative, NIH should be assessing whether those who receive funding are adequately mentoring junior researchers rather than simply assessing productivity and output in terms of papers and grant success. This includes measuring NIH's success in retaining under-represented minorities as investigators.

Ultimately, we believe this new initiative is a short term solution that will "kick the can down the road" for a few more years, and may simply result in other labs with one R01 dropping out, rather than redistributing these funds from those investigators with comfortable levels of funding. It is also not clear, and we are not confident, that redistribution of funds can be adequately carried out at the level of the individual institutes, as each institute is subject to individual pressures, and we call for any measure to be centrally enforced.

We are encouraged, however, by the disappointed reaction to the decision to drop the GSI proposal from investigators across all career stages. This is not an issue of career stage vs career stage, but instead we believe the majority of NIH investigators believe in a sustainable enterprise, and this discussion has instead been dominated by the self-interested few. The investigators who believe in a sustainable model through capping of funds are thus now rallying to make themselves heard.

Therefore, we urge all who are concerned about this issue to sign a petition calling on Dr. Francis Collins to reconsider the cap and put it back on the table as an option moving towards a more long-term solution to distribution of NIH funds. The petition is here: <http://bit.ly/2sDFOdI>

We also urge members of the community to email the following people, to make clear that continued support for capping individual investigator funding is definitely heard:

Francis Collins: [francis.collins\[at\]nih.gov](mailto:francis.collins@nih.gov)

Lawrence Tabak: [lawrence.tabak\[at\]nih.gov](mailto:lawrence.tabak@nih.gov)

Michael Lauer: [michael.lauer\[at\]nih.gov](mailto:michael.lauer@nih.gov)

The director of your specific institute(s), if applicable.