



7/13/2021

National Cancer Institute
9000 Rockville Pike
Bethesda, MD, 20892

RE: RFI: Seeking Stakeholder Input on Enhancing Diversity and Inclusion in the Cancer Research Workforce
NOT-CA-21-067

Submitted electronically to: NCI.RFI.DiversityandInclusionWorkforce@nih.gov

The American Society of Hematology (ASH) appreciates the opportunity to respond to the National Cancer Institute's (NCI) request for Information (RFI) aimed at enhancing diversity and inclusion in the cancer research workforce. As a Society that represents over 18,000 scientists and clinicians, ASH is committed to diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) in hematology research and practice. More importantly, the Society is dedicated to advocating for policies and supporting programs that aim to eliminate health disparities in both malignant and non-malignant hematologic diseases.

On April 9, 2021, ASH [responded](#) to the National Institutes of Health's (NIH) UNITE Initiative's RFI on approaches it should take to advance DEI in biomedical research and the workforce. The Society believes its comments in that RFI are valuable and applicable to the NCI's request. Below are highlights of ASH's DEI recommendations to the NIH:

For potential investigators in the pipeline, ASH believes the obstacles that impact their career paths begin very early. Below are specific examples of obstacles that the Society believes NCI should aim to address.

- NCI should consider expanding the work of the Center to Reduce Cancer Health Disparities including their efforts aimed at increasing novel programs for graduate and medical schools that serve underrepresented students to reduce financial barriers to careers in research.
- There is a limited number of mentors from underrepresented groups that can help foster the careers of the next generation of researchers and physicians. The few mentors that exist have huge demands on their time. The NCI should consider offering financial incentives (e.g., funding for administrative support) that will allow underrepresented faculty and mentors to have protected time dedicated to mentorship of junior investigators. Furthermore, the institutes should offer resources and tools that will help all faculty be better mentors to trainees from underrepresented groups.
- Bias is also a key barrier to training and mentorship. NCI should invest in developing (and/or promoting existing) resources aimed at addressing implicit bias in research and clinical practice.
- Underrepresented groups need "safe spaces" to raise their concerns and to have them addressed. Such spaces could also provide a forum for NCI and various academic institutions to learn more about the obstacles faced by underrepresented groups so that policies can be implemented and/or revised to address such obstacles.
- Make certain that anti-racist policies are adopted, implemented, and measured at the NCI and across academic institutions receiving NCI funding.
- Improve tenure and promotion by revising the evaluation criteria. Include both scientific and "non-traditional" accomplishments (i.e., committee service, advocacy, etc.) when evaluating progress and metrics for success.

Included below is one action that ASH is currently taking to improve representation and address barriers impeding the biomedical research enterprise:



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- Through its Minority Recruitment Initiative, ASH addresses the underrepresentation of scholars in the field of hematology from diverse backgrounds by offering two four-year research awards to support historically disadvantaged physicians (MD/DO, PhD, and MD/DO-PhD) who are committed to developing careers in academic medicine and to serving as role models for students and faculty of similar backgrounds. The Society would welcome the opportunity to enhance the mentorship opportunities offered through this program.

There is a perception that NIH's grant review process is not conducive to ensuring that grants from underrepresented applicants are appropriately considered. To address this perception:

- NCI should ensure that its National Cancer Advisory Board (NCAB) is inclusive of individuals from underrepresented backgrounds to further enrich and enhance the grant review process. The NCI could solicit assistance from professional societies like ASH that have access to a diverse pool of members who may be willing to serve as NCAB members.
- NCI should consider actively supporting areas of cancer research that people from underrepresented backgrounds might focus on (i.e., research focused on social determinants of health).
- NCI program officers and NCAB members should actively engage in anti-racism training.
- NCI should engage an external organization to audit its grant review processes and procedures to identify additional areas for improvement.

ASH would like to thank the NCI for the opportunity to comment on this important subject and looks forward to serving as a resource for the Institute on this issue. Please contact ASH's Deputy Director of Diversity Programs, Lisa Fanning, MA, at lfanning@hematology.org for any additional information.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Martin S. Tallman'.

Martin S. Tallman, MD
ASH President