

Marie A. Bernard, MD
Chief Officer for Scientific Workforce Diversity
National Institutes of Health
Bethesda, MD 20814

Feb. 09, 2022

Dear Dr. Bernard,

The Endocrine Society appreciates the opportunity to respond to the Draft NIH Chief Officer for Scientific Workforce Diversity (COSWD) Strategic Plan for FYs 2022-2026. Founded in 1916, the Endocrine Society is the world's oldest, largest, and most active organization of scientists and healthcare professionals dedicated to research on hormones and the clinical treatment of patients with endocrine diseases.

We enthusiastically welcome your vision to enable NIH and funded institutions to benefit from a full range of talent, fostering creativity and innovation in science. We also appreciate your action-oriented approach to the strategic plan, building on a strong foundation of evidence to "catalyze cultures of inclusive excellence."

With your role as a Co-Chair of the UNITE Initiative, we recognize that there will be important synergies between implementation of the plan and other important efforts by NIH to improve diversity, equity, and inclusion (DEI) throughout the intramural and extramural research community. During our review of the draft Strategic Plan, we identified several areas where our recommendations to the UNITE Initiative RFI would also be consistent with the goals and objectives of the Scientific Workforce Diversity Strategic Plan.

Improving the Environment for Training and Mentoring:

We recognize the importance of advancing systems that have been shown to reduce bias and achieve equity in mentoring. Our members report that many of the obstacles facing underrepresented minority (URM) scientists throughout their training, mentoring, and career path are compounded by the lack of diversity among faculty at all career stages. Consequently, activities to improve the environment for mentors and trainees will also depend on targeted efforts to retain URM scientists throughout the workforce. Evaluations of programs should therefore consider outcomes related to DEI retention at all stages of a scientist's career, and whether programs and initiatives have reduced the burden placed on senior URM faculty. To achieve these objectives, NIH Should:

- Initiate programs that seek to retain URM scientists by providing targeted funding at critical career points, for example the transition from post-doctoral fellowship to K award, and from K to R award, etc.
- Allow URM faculty to serve as a mentor on training grants, irrespective of funding status.
- Create incentives for URM mentorship activities, e.g., for mentors of F- and K08 or K23 awardees, or for K24-supported mentoring activities, and for individuals within a center grant or as trainers in education cores.



- Recruit promising URM candidates at all training stages through outreach to students/trainees who take non-traditional career pathways (e.g., a postdoctoral fellow who works in industry for a time) or who temporarily explore other careers due to interest or due to a gap in funding.

Improving Existing NIH Policies

In response to the UNITE Initiative RFI, we proposed several important adjustments to existing policies that would improve DEI. We offer these recommendations again in this context because these actions would improve retention of scientists from diverse backgrounds, increase the diversity of perspectives in important decision-making bodies at NIH, and incentivize institutional commitments such that they are aligned with the goals of the COSWD Strategic Plan. Specifically, NIH should:

- Enhance diversity by making exceptions to funding rules for URM faculty that would allow them to serve on a study section and/or be eligible to be trainers on training grants if they face a gap in funding.
- Incentivize institutional commitment to DEI by giving grants with strong DEI components preferential treatment for funding decisions.
- Initiate programs aimed at retaining mid-career URM faculty, for example by payline adjustments or encouraging ICs to advance URM “at-risk” candidates for beyond-payline funding.

Finally, we reiterate that NIH will need to take bold actions to reduce disparities throughout the biomedical research workforce and achieve the stated DEI goals of the strategic plan. We support the cross-cutting themes of collaboration, accountability, and evaluation to ensure that NIH, institutions, and other stakeholders in the biomedical research enterprise are answerable for their commitments and effort in achieving the goals of the strategic plan. The Endocrine Society and our membership stand ready to work with you to implement the plan in the coming years; if we can be of further assistance please contact Joe Laakso, PhD, Director of Science Policy at jlaakso@endocrine.org.

Sincerely,

Carol H. Wysham, MD
President
Endocrine Society