



# FASEB

Federation of American Societies  
for Experimental Biology

## Representing Over 130,000 Researchers

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January 20, 2022

Center for Scientific Review

Advisory Council Working Group on Fellowship Review

**In response to January 6, 2022 Review Matters blog post on [Strengthening Fellowship Review](#)**

Submitted electronically via email: [feedback@csr.nih.gov](mailto:feedback@csr.nih.gov)

Dear Committee members,

The Federation of American Societies for Experimental Biology (FASEB), representing 30 scientific societies and over 130,000 individual scientists, is appreciative for the focus on improving peer review of National Institutes of Health (NIH) National Research Service Award (NRSA) fellowship applications. FASEB commends Center for Scientific Review for seeking community input on review criteria for NRSA as one strategy to foster retention of talented biological and biomedical scientists from diverse backgrounds.

Quality mentorship is a key aspect for NRSA awardees' growth; the National Academies of Sciences, Engineering, and Medicine report, [The Science of Effective Mentorship in STEMM](#), highlights the benefits of non-dyadic mentoring structures. The current emphasis on the sponsor does not create an expectation that trainees sustain a meaningful mentor network. Thus, FASEB recommends revising criteria for trainee fellowships to shift norms away from dyadic models of mentorship to mentoring networks to fulfill the scientific and professional development needs of the trainee, including opportunities beyond academia.

Furthermore, scored criteria regarding the sponsor(s') track record of mentoring trainees should be revised to emphasize evidence-based mentoring skills and continuous pedagogical training, rather than the commonly used metric of past trainees placed in desirable positions that favors senior faculty (and academic research career tracks). The status quo penalizes trainees that join relatively new laboratories. Moreover, commitment to mentoring is not correlated to length of time as a Principal Investigator (PI); just as there are senior PIs who do little to actively mentor students, there are junior PIs who voluntarily and routinely undergo mentor training to improve their skills. Scoring the sponsor(s') ability to mentor trainees should reflect the effort to utilize evidence-based practices.

Additionally, scoring and discussion of academic record in fellowship applications should be reevaluated. Evidence suggests that traditional metrics such as undergraduate [grade point average](#) and [GRE scores](#) are not predictors of success in graduate school.

FASEB looks forward to the Working Group's efforts on this important topic. However, we strongly recommend issuance of an official Request for Information with adequate response time to ensure the highest quality feedback from the extramural community and external stakeholders as final recommendations and implementations plans are developed.

Sincerely,

Patricia L. Morris, MS, PhD  
FASEB President