

Key aspects for a successful fellowship grant **Reviewers' Perspective**

Ashok Kumar, Ph.D.

University of Louisville School of Medicine
Louisville, Kentucky. USA

F30/31/32 Funding Mechanisms

- F30:** Ruth L. Kirschstein Individual Predoctoral NRSA for MD/PhD and other Dual Degree Fellowships (DO/PhD, DDS/PhD, and DVM/PhD)
- F31:** Ruth L. Kirschstein Predoctoral individual National Research Service Award (NRSA)
- F32:** Ruth L. Kirschstein Postdoctoral individual NRSA

SCORED REVIEW CRITERIA

1. Fellowship Applicant:

a. Statement about career goal:

- Should be in applicant's Biosketch (Research, Teaching, Biotech industry etc).
- Why you picked your sponsor's laboratory for your proposed training?

b. Academic qualification:

- Grades in undergraduate and graduate level courses
- GRE/MCAT scores (F30/F31)
- Awards and fellowships during undergraduate and graduate studies
- Research experience during undergraduate studies or even during high school (F30/F31)
- Poster presentation in regional, national, international conferences
- Publications in peer reviewed journals (F30/F31; Even middle author publications help)
- Progress in your current project (Is project now well-defined, F30/F31)
(Preliminary data is not required but anything which supports your current project is always helpful)

Additional criteria for F32

- Publications from undergraduate work (Number of publications and quality of journals)
- Is post-doctoral training sufficiently different from your graduate training?
- Define your career goals in sufficient detail – Research, Industry, Teaching,?
- How many years you have been as post-doc and the productivity?

SCORED REVIEW CRITERIA

1. Fellowship Applicant:

c. Reference letters:

- Your dissertation committee (F30/F31) should be formed before applying for fellowship
- Letters from committee members or from those with whom you have closely worked.
- Reference letters should be specific to candidate's strength and weaknesses and potential to become a successful scientist.

SCORED REVIEW CRITERIA

2. Sponsors, Collaborators, and Consultants:

Sponsor: Reputation of the sponsor in his/her area of research- Publications/funding history

Mentoring history: Graduate and post-doctoral fellows previously trained by the mentor?
How previously trained students and post-doctoral fellows have moved in their career?
If your sponsor is a new investigator, include an experienced/established investigator as co-sponsor.

Funding: Does the sponsor has funding to support the candidate's research training?
There should be enough funding to support your research training because F mechanism does not provide funds for your research work.

Co-sponsor: Having co-sponsor/collaborators/consultants is always plus.
Integrate their role in your training plan.

Mentoring Committee: Although not common but it is good to have a committee even for post-doctoral fellows (F32) which can monitor candidate's progress and guide in his/her career path.

SCORED REVIEW CRITERIA

3. Research Training Plan:

- Well-defined specific aims. Highlight significance and impact of the proposed research
- Clearly written hypotheses and include potential pitfalls and alternative approaches
- **Don't Copy and Paste** your mentor's R01 grant even though it has some overlap
- Research should be innovative but should not be too ambitious
- Get your research plan thoroughly reviewed by your mentor.
(Too many typos and grammatical errors reflect weakness in mentorship)
- Research training should be within the expertise of sponsor(s) and/or collaborator(s)
- Explain clearly what new assays and technologies will be learnt during the fellowship
- Can you get quality publications and degree (F30/F31) from the proposed research?

Additional criteria for F32

- Is your proposed research training sufficiently novel and thorough that it will lead you to an independent faculty position in academic institution?

SCORED REVIEW CRITERIA

4. Training Potential:

- Will new technical skills and experimental design/approaches beyond what is already learnt?
- Do training activities match candidate's stated career goals?
- Does individualized training addresses current weaknesses and career development for the candidate
- Do the proposed research and other training activities provide sufficient individual and supervised experiences that will develop her/his research skills for future independent career?

Important points to include in training part of the application:

- Lab environment (Number of students and post-docs, journal clubs etc.)
- New skills and techniques during the fellowship training.
- Conferences and presentations (~2 conferences per year; poster presentation, scientific networking)
- Mentoring opportunities (Train junior researchers and high school students)
- Teaching (Good to have opportunities for class-room teaching or TA position)
- Development of manuscripts and grants writing skills
- Getting involved in writing IACUC and IBC protocols

SCORED REVIEW CRITERIA

5. Institutional Environment & Commitment to Training:

- Reputation of the institution for graduate and undergraduate training
- Seminars at the host institution
- Equipment/Facility in sponsor's and collaborators' laboratory
- Potential for collaboration within and outside the institution
- Core facilities at the institution to support candidate's research
- Office of Graduate and Postdoctoral Studies. It is now required to have this information. (Quite helpful in professional development and resolution of COI in some situations)

ADDITIONAL REVIEW CRITERIA

1. Protections of human subjects

2. Vertebrate animals

- Same as for R series applications
- Insufficient details can affect chances of your success

ADDITIONAL CONSIDERATIONS

Responsible conduct of Research (RCR)

- Format of RCR course (online/class room)
- Subject matter (what was taught?)
- Faculty participation
- Duration of RCR course
- Frequency (discussion during lab meetings, formal course every 2-3 years etc)

Questions?