

## Tips for Writing a Competitive Extramural LRP Application

Successful applicants to the Loan Repayment Programs (LRP) take great care to create an application that presents their work and dedication to research. The guidelines below highlight important criteria and are suggestions for writing a competitive application. Give yourself plenty of time and utilize the LRP Information Center.

- **Connect with an LRP Liaison.** You should reach out to the LRP liaisons at the NIH Institutes/Centers to discuss your research goals and ask about the Institute/Center's research priorities. We strongly encourage first-time applicants to talk to at least one liaison before starting an LRP application.
- **Know the funding priorities of your NIH Institute or Center (IC).** Not every institute has the same priorities for funding LRP applications across the different subcategories. For example, it is important to understand the definition of “clinical research” because it can be very difficult for Ph.D.s who do not interact with patients to be funded by some ICs. Carefully read the descriptions for each LRP subcategory and contact your IC liaison to verify that your research is within the scientific mission of the IC you selected. If you are applying to the REACH LRP subcategory, be sure to review the REACH Priority Statements for information on each IC-specified research area that is considered to be an emerging and/or gap area.
- **Effectively demonstrate your qualifications and commitment to research.** These are very important parameters, and the successful applicant must emphasize them in their application and Biosketch. Don't sell yourself short in the Biosketch and don't be humble about your accomplishments. Anything that shows your commitment to research should be included.
- **Collaborate with your mentor(s) to effectively communicate resources and support.** LRPs are not mentored research awards, such as the fellowship (F) and career development (K) awards, but because many LRP applicants are in the early stages of their careers, often they are in mentored situations. Make sure your mentor is a recognized expert in your field, has published extensively, and has grant support, preferably from NIH. Work with your mentors on their parts of the application to ensure that the mentoring plan accurately reflects all of the support you have available for your research. If you have more than one mentor, be sure that the role each mentor plays is clearly defined.

- **Show a strong research plan.** While reviewers are urged not to re-review the science in an LRP application, there will likely be a certain amount of examination of your research goals and methods. Therefore, you should have a research plan that you have written with input from your mentor(s). If your research plan is not innovative to the reviewers, your chances of getting LRP funds are greatly diminished.
- **Provide strong reference letters.** Make sure that your reference letters are extremely strong. When selecting individuals to write your reference letters, choose senior colleagues who are very familiar with your work and who will be able to cast your skills as a researcher and your commitment to research in the best light. Impress upon them the competitive nature of the program and ask that they take time to comprehensively respond to the questions. Providing a one or two sentence response is generally not adequate. If you are a junior researcher and your publication record is short or non-existent, have your references address that and ask them to emphasize your enthusiasm, diligence, and any other quality that denotes commitment to a research career. Make sure you give your referees adequate time to respond.
- **Ensure a positive overall impression.** Because LRP reviewers are looking at your overall research potential, they form their opinion by using all of the above points. The more all elements are clearly described, the better your chances of receiving a loan repayment award.

## Common Reasons Why LRP Applications Aren't Funded

1. Weak or lukewarm reference letters.
2. Questionable research commitment. Sometimes, reviewers don't get a sense of the applicant's commitment to research. This occurs frequently with junior applicants. If your accomplishments are limited, make sure your application reflects your strong commitment to research and that the reference letters attest to this.
3. Mediocre research plan.
4. Rushed application. While the application process is straightforward and the LRP Information Center is there to aid applicants up until the deadline, last minute submissions are not a good idea and tend to fare poorly.
5. Inadequate research environment that is not conducive to applicant's research aspirations.
6. Poor publication record without explanation.