



February 9, 2011

TO: Office of Management and Budget (OMB)  
Through: Mikia Currie, NIH Project Clearance Branch  
Office of Policy for Extramural Research Administration  
Office of Extramural Research, OD, NIH\_\_\_\_\_

FROM: Pam Gilden, Grants Policy Analyst  
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Office of Policy for Extramural Research Administration  
Office of Extramural Research, OD, NIH

SUBJECT: **Amendment to the Fellowship Applicant Biographical Sketch  
Instructions in the PHS 416-1 Individual Fellowship Application  
(OMB No. 0925-0002, expires 6/2012)**

The Individual Fellowship Application Guide for NIH and AHRQ enables individual fellowship applicants to compete for funding for research training activities under the Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Award (NRSA) Program authority. The purpose of this memorandum is to seek OMB approval of a change to the instructions for the Fellowship Applicant Biographical Sketch, which is cleared as part of the PHS 416-1 Individual Fellowship application covered under OMB No. 0925-0002.

The Fellowship Applicant Biographical Sketch is required in competing Individual Fellowship applications to provide information about predoctoral and postdoctoral Fellowship Applicants for National Research Service Awards (NRSAs).

Biographical Sketches are used in two ways: (1) by NIH extramural program officials and grants management specialists to ascertain qualifications and to monitor awards by ensuring that personnel are appropriately trained and qualified for their role on a project; and (2) by peer reviewers in their evaluation of the scientific and technical merit of applications through the NIH peer review system.

Extramural scientists have questioned perceived inequities in the NIH grant review process because there is no clear way to address personal career impediments in a grant application. This is a particularly serious issue because peer reviewers must explicitly assess the productivity of the Fellowship Applicant as part of their assessment of one of five core review criteria. NIH scientific review groups use the information in the

Biographical Sketch to determine if the Fellowship Applicant's academic record and research experience is of high quality and if the individual has the potential to develop as an independent and productive researcher in biomedical, behavioral, or clinical science.

The lack of a clear place to describe family care responsibilities, illness, disabilities, and other factors that may influence productivity and career training means that everyone is assumed to be fully employed/training at all stages leading up to the preparation of an application. A career hiatus can occur at any time, and we also know that this is a more predictable problem for women who often shoulder the primary responsibilities for child care and other family care issues.

Currently, there is no way to convey information about career/training interruptions to peer reviewers, implicitly biasing the process against those who may have had a lapse in their career. To level the playing field and help obviate these factors from the peer review process, the NIH Workgroup on Women in Biomedical Research Careers recommended, and NIH Director Dr. Frances Collins concurred, that NIH should offer an opportunity within the Biographical Sketch that allows applicants to explain any lapses in productivity/training that might have been caused by illness or other factors. Not everyone will have a need to provide this kind of information, but for those that do, it is expected that the opportunity is to be welcome.

NIH proposes to change the Fellowship Applicant Biographical Sketch instructions by adding the instruction to Section A. in bold type below:

- A. Personal statement. Briefly describe why your experience and qualifications make you particularly well-suited for your role as a Fellowship applicant. **Within this section you may, if you choose, briefly describe factors such as family care responsibilities, illness, disability, and active duty military service that may have affected your scientific advancement or productivity.**
- B. Positions and Honors
- C. Publications
- D. Scholastic Performance

We estimate that this change will have no effect on the total burden hours. The Fellowship Applicant Biographical Sketch is part of the extensive Individual Fellowship application package and the burden hours for the Fellowship Applicant Biographical Sketch are not calculated separately. The page limit for the Fellowship Applicant Biographical Sketch for all fellowship levels will remain at 4 pages.

Thank you for your consideration of this request.