Survey of NIH Grant Applicants' Application and Submission Experiences Focus Group Opening Script

Hello and welcome. Thank you for meeting with us today. My name is Dr. Ami Lynch and I am from Social Solutions International, Inc., a research and evaluation firm that works on a wide range of issues to improve the health and well-being for underserved populations and communities. Thank you for being here to share your thoughts and ideas. My role today is simply to guide our discussion and to make sure that everyone has an opportunity to share their experiences and opinions.

Opening Comments:
Social Solutions has been contracted by the NIH Center for Scientific Review to help gain a better understanding of the experiences of New and Early Stage Investigators. The purpose of this focus group is to build on data from a larger survey of New Investigators by gathering specific experiences, examples, and ideas. Ultimately, the results of this focus group, together with a survey of applicants' experiences, will be used to identify unique barriers and challenges New and Early Stage Investigators face in securing R01 grant funding from NIH, as well as understand how these factors can be mitigated.

Privacy:
This focus group discussion should last approximately 90 minutes. We would like to tape record the discussion so we can keep track of what you tell us. We will not refer to you by name during the audio recording, and ask that other participants refrain from doing so as well. This will ensure that no comments you make can be connected to your name to protect your privacy to the extent permitted by law. When you wish to join in on the discussion and respond to a question, please raise your hand. What you say is very important and we do not want to miss anything. We are only recording the discussion to make sure we don't miss any of the information you share.

Your names will be tracked to account for the distribution of incentives, but this information will not be shared with anyone at NIH or CSR. The information you share with us today will not be linked to your name in anyway, will not affect your ability to apply for or secure funding from NIH in the future, and will never be associated with your NIH applications.

We would like to ask everyone to keep the information that you hear from the discussion group private and not to discuss it outside of this room. We want you to feel comfortable sharing your personal opinions and experiences with the group so that we can learn from you.

Your participation in this group is entirely voluntary, and you are free to leave at any point if you find it necessary. I will be available after the session this evening to answer any questions you may have about the discussion or the project in general. If you need to get up and stretch, get food or drink, and/or use the rest room during the focus group, please feel free to do so. We just ask that you do so quietly because of the recording.

Discussion Group Rules:
First, since each and every person's comments are important, we ask that only one person speak at a time. This will help us to hear each other. There is no such thing as a right or wrong answer in this group. We have no expectations about what is going to be said. Tell us what you honestly think, and feel free to share whatever is on your mind. If you disagree with something that you hear, let us know. If you agree, don't just say, "I agree", but try to add your own perspective or opinions. We want to hear as many different opinions, ideas, and stories as possible.

Consent
As you came in, you were asked to sign an informed consent statement. In order to participate today, we must have your written consent. Is there anyone who has not signed the consent statement?

[Social Solutions researchers will ensure that the number of participants matches the number of signed consent forms prior to proceeding. If the numbers do not match, Social Solutions will confirm whether they have completed theirs privately with each participant, to avoid identifying participant to each other.]

Does anyone have any questions at this time?
I am going to turn on the tape recorder now so we can get started…

Survey of NIH Grant Applicants' Application and Submission Experiences
Researcher/External Stakeholder Focus Group
Probes/Questions

Perceived experience of Target Audiences
1. Describe your specific experience with the R01 grant application process.

Probes: What is significant about this process to you? What are the advantages and disadvantages? Describe the advantages and disadvantages. What was most challenging part and why?

2. What kind of help did you receive throughout your grant application process?

Probes: From whom? What was most/least helpful? How did you hear about funding opportunities?

3. What was your reaction to the critiques you received (also called a summary statement)? How did that affect your decision to revise and resubmit?
4. What factors do you think prevented you from receiving grant funding from NIH? What barriers to receiving grant funding in the future do you see?

Probes: Working with researchers who already received R01s? Demonstrating your research experience? Garnering institutional support? Demonstrating innovation?

5. Will you apply for R01 grants from NIH in the future? Why/why not? How will your approach differ?

6. Describe your specific experience with the R01 grant revision and resubmission process.

Perception of the grant application and peer review process
1. How fair do you think the grant application and review process is? Why?
2. How independent do you think the grant application and review process is? Why?
3. How welcoming of minority applicants do you perceive NIH to be? In what ways?
4. To what extent do you view the peer review process as independent and unbiased? Why?
5. What is your perception of the level of expertise of the panel reviewing your application?
6. How much do you think perception of your home institution affected your ability to receive grant funding? Why?

Awareness of areas for improvement
1. If you were to sit down with CSR to improve materials and support, what would you tell them and why?
2. Describe your contact with NIH. In what ways is their support helpful/unhelpful?
3. Who did you contact for support and questions at each stage of the application process? Your mentors/colleagues? NIH staff?
4. How can NIH mitigate the challenges and remove the barriers discussed earlier?

Thank You

Thank you again for taking the time to speak with us today. The information you have provided is very helpful. If you have any questions please feel free to contact me via email or phone. Thank you.