

Office of Research on Women's Health

Science Series

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The ORWH Reentry Program

The Office of Research on Women's Health (ORWH) has, as part of its mission, the mandate to develop programs committed to the recruitment, retention, reentry, and advancement of women in biomedical and behavioral science careers. The National Institutes of Health (NIH) is committed to supporting the research careers of women and men in the biomedical and behavioral sciences from early investigator through senior scientist.

To determine the barriers that women face when considering a scientific career, the ORWH held a public hearing and a workshop, *Women in Biomedical Careers: Dynamics of Change, Strategies for the 21st Century*. At the hearing and the workshop, many women described the significant barriers they face when trying to reenter their field of research after taking time off from their careers for caregiving responsibilities. To address this barrier, the ORWH collaborated with NIH Institutes and Centers to design a reentry program to offer support for women and men to reenter scientific research after having interrupted their research careers to attend to family or other personal responsibilities.

After 2 years of success as an ORWH pilot program, the ORWH Reentry Program was expanded to a trans-NIH program. Currently, 23 NIH Institutes and Centers and the Office of Dietary Supplements have joined with the ORWH to support the program, *Supplements to Promote Reentry into Biomedical and Behavioral*

Research Careers (PA-08-191) (<http://grants.nih.gov/grants/guide/pa-files/PA-08-191.html>).

Supplements To Promote Reentry into Biomedical and Behavioral Research Careers

The Reentry Program provides administrative supplements to existing NIH research grants for the purpose of supporting full- or part-time research by women or men reentering the scientific workforce. The program is designed to bring the scientist's existing research skills and knowledge up-to-date, so that, at the completion of the supplement, the scientist will be in a position to apply for a career development or research award.

The Reentry Program includes three necessary components that, together, contribute to the process of reestablishing awardees as independent, competitive research scientists:

- Full participation in the research project;
- An opportunity to update and enhance research capabilities; and
- A carefully planned mentoring program developed by the mentor and the awardee.

To date, over 125 women and men have received *Supplements to Promote Reentry into Biomedical and Behavioral Research Careers* awards.

Evaluation of the Reentry Program

In 1995, the first 3 years of the ORWH Reentry Program were evaluated. Both mentors and awardees found the ORWH Reentry Program to be an effective vehicle for increasing awardee expertise in a broad range of skill areas, including laboratory techniques, writing proposals and applications, and budgeting. Additionally, all awardees felt that the Reentry Program award advanced their long-term career goals.

All previous and current awardees of the Reentry Program were asked to participate in a 2007 evaluation of the *Supplements to Promote Reentry into Biomedical and Behavioral Research Careers* program. The results indicate that:

- All awardees would encourage others to participate in the Reentry Program;
- More than 80 percent of awardees are still in scientific research;
- 85 percent of awardees felt that the Reentry Program advanced their scientific careers;
- All awardees found the Reentry Program to be an effective vehicle for increasing their scientific knowledge and most found it to be effective in increasing their expertise in laboratory techniques, computing, management, teaching, scientific writing, grant writing, and networking;
- More than 40 percent of awardees classified the availability of resources, in the forms of funding and protected time, as the most useful aspect of the Reentry Program;
- More than half of the awardees applied for research funding after completing the Reentry Program and two-thirds of those received independent funding;
- 83 percent of female awardees and 75 percent of male awardees have published at least one manuscript since beginning the Reentry Program; and
- Most awardees rated the mentoring relationship as excellent or close to excellent.

Criteria for Receiving Reentry Supplements

- Candidates must have a doctoral degree, such as M.D., D.D.S, Ph.D., O.D., D.V.M., or equivalent, and must have been in a postdoctoral or faculty position at the time they left active research.
- The duration of hiatus of the scientist generally ranges from 1 to 8 years. The scientist should not be engaged in full-time paid research activities at the time of reentry.
- The supplement must be applied to an existing NIH research grant with a minimum of 2 years of funding remaining and must be directly related to the ongoing research of the parent grant.
- A maximum of 3 years of support can be awarded, with the awardee working either full-time or part-time.
- The scientist must be afforded the opportunity to act as a full participant in the research project and must be given an opportunity to update and enhance her or his research capabilities. This will allow the candidate to begin the process of establishing or reestablishing a career as a productive, competitive research investigator.