

## NEWS

# Mixed budget outlook for young scientists

US President Barack Obama's proposed budget for fiscal year 2011 looks to be a mixed bag for young scientists. If Congress accepts the president's budget requests, postdocs funded by the National Institutes of Health (NIH) will receive a significant stipend boost. But biomedical early-career scientists, although bolstered by an ongoing federal initiative to keep their grant application success rates high, are facing a decline in the number of available competing grants. Early-stage researchers in other fields, meanwhile, may benefit from higher allocations in such areas as energy and climate change. The US\$66-billion non-defence research and development budget was announced earlier this month.

Under the proposal, postdoctoral training stipends funded by the NIH's Ruth L. Kirschstein National Research Service Awards (NRSAs) would go up by 6%, on the heels of a 1% increase implemented for fiscal-year 2010 that follows several years without a rise. "If this goes through, it will be fantastic for postdoctoral scholars," says Cathie Johnson Phillips, executive director of the National Postdoctoral Association (NPA). "It is a recognition of their value to the scientific enterprise."

The boost, Johnson Phillips notes, would set a significant precedent, as many universities and research institutions across the nation use the NRSA as a standard for their own postdoctoral pay levels. The proposed increase "will challenge US institutions to pay their postdocs more", she says. Johnson Phillips says that the NPA plans to ask members to advocate for the increase to federal legislators. "We are making this one of our priorities this year," she says.

Overall, Obama's budget request for the NIH seeks \$32.1 billion, up \$1 billion — although it will fund 199 fewer competing grants. An NIH policy established last year calls for 'special consideration' of early-career researchers' grant applications, which means they are guaranteed to be funded at the same success rate as more seasoned investigators, says Sally Rockey, the NIH's acting deputy director for extramural research.

However, fewer available competing grants must inevitably translate into fewer awards for all applicants in 2011 than in 2010. "Success rates will dip for everyone unless the NIH gets a larger appropriation from Congress," says Howard Garrison, director of the office of public affairs of the Federation of American

Societies for Experimental Biology.

The proposed National Science Foundation (NSF) allocation, up about 8% to \$7.4 billion, includes about \$6 billion for core research activities. Two of three programmes aimed specifically at early-career researchers and graduate students would be funded at higher levels under the president's budget proposal. CAREER, the NSF's faculty early-career development programme, which aims to get more young investigators into faculty positions, is up by 6.5% to \$209.2 million, and the Graduate Research Fellowship Program is up by 16.4% to \$158.2 million.

The Department of Energy budget would rise by more than 7% to \$28.4 billion, including a 16% increase to \$370 million for global climate-change research. This and other budget increases could mean significant grant funding opportunities for young investigators who often have the most innovative proposals, says Martin Apple, president of the Council of Scientific Society Presidents.

"If you are a young investigator, there are hundreds of millions of dollars that weren't there before," says Apple.

**Karen Kaplan**



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## PROSPECTS

## Salary boost

Negotiating for a pay rise can be a smooth, fruitful process if you follow a few guidelines, says **Deb Koen**.

When it comes to a pay rise, don't expect your superiors to recognize accomplishments without some prompting. Keeping in mind the following steps should help foster the desired outcome.

### Make the case

Be on the lookout for opportune times to negotiate a rise — for example, when you have published new results, secured additional funding or noticed that your superior is in a good mood. Having settled on the timing of your request, prepare to make a compelling argument. Frame the request in terms of the value you bring to your employer. Focus on your contributions, including not only specific achievements but also assets that may be overlooked — for example, perhaps you have become the 'go to' scientist for certain areas, or your good humour bolsters the morale of lab mates. If you are a seasoned scientist and valued employee, the costs to recruit and develop your replacement could cost the organization twice your salary.

You may find it useful to prepare a one-page 'highlights' paper that you use as a guide for the conversation.

### Anticipate potential responses

Preparing for a variety of outcomes will lead to greater self-assurance in approaching the negotiation. Get an accurate idea of the going rate by checking salaries for comparable roles in and outside your workplace.

If you get an increase, follow up with a brief thank-you note reaffirming your commitment to deliver on performance. If 'maybe', attempt to uncover the underlying objection. Be sure to highlight your contributions, intentions and commitment to the organization.

If a 'no' surfaces, seek feedback on what you can do to position yourself for a rise. Ask for a three-month review. Have a plan B in case you're disappointed. Explore the possibility of additional benefits in lieu of a salary increase (such as new equipment, more holiday, flexible scheduling), and, if all else fails, be ready to network for other job prospects.

### Reinforce the relationship

Although negotiation sometimes creates tension, don't lose sight of the ongoing employment relationship. You're looking for a process that will not only advance your agenda but will also preserve or enhance your relationship. Cite your record, your demonstrated commitment and the potential for future contributions.

Make sure that your employer recognizes the value you bring to the organization. If not, you may want to reassess; it may be time to discreetly update your CV. From this point on, keep a record of accomplishments on which you can easily draw to negotiate for future salary increases, prepare for performance appraisals or update your resumé.

Maintain perspective. The discussion doesn't have to be a win-lose encounter but can be a conversation in which you explore options that will benefit both you and your employer.

**Deb Koen is president and chief executive of Career Development Services in Rochester, New York.**