

**Genetics Society of America Response to NIH Request for Information
Sustaining the Biomedical Workforce and a Potential Emeritus Award for Senior Researchers**

[Request for Information \(NOT-OD-15-064\)](#) • [Input Form](#)

Submitted March 2, 2015

Responses are limited to 21,000 characters per topic. All responses must be submitted by March 6, 2015.

Comment 1: Community interest in an emeritus award that allows a senior investigator to transition out of a role or position that relies on funding from NIH research grants.

The Genetics Society of America (GSA) recognizes that the critical shortage of funding for investigator-initiated awards is a compelling reason to consider any and all ideas for ways to mitigate this problem. We believe the most compelling need for any award that supports an investigator transitioning out of NIH research support is to protect the return on investment made in research projects whose results have not yet been published or whose research materials have not been distributed to those who can make best use of them.

Rather than setting up a new type of award, however, the GSA believes that the intent of the proposal can be achieved through administrative flexibility of program officers and other staff at NIH. Indeed, this would prevent establishment of another set-aside that would further exacerbate the limited funding NIH has available. An announcement to all current grant holders that NIH staff have a range of administrative options available to them to help in the orderly conclusion of research programs would likely identify those investigators that are already thinking about how to wind down their programs.

Comment 2: Ideas for how one would utilize an emeritus award (e.g., to facilitate laboratory closure; to promote partnership between a senior and junior investigator; to provide opportunities for acquiring skills needed for transitioning to a new role).

The Genetics Society of America (GSA) believes that the most effective use of such an award is to protect previous investments in the research project that would be curtailed, such as in transferring useful research stocks or materials to other investigators or facilitating others in finishing partially completed lines of research. As noted above, we believe that an emeritus

transition program can best be handled administratively, rather than by establishing a completely new mechanism.

However, we do not believe it is desirable or appropriate for junior investigators to take over the research programs of senior investigators who are ending their research careers. Although it may be reasonable for a senior investigator to transfer a specific set of experiments and/or materials, establishing another colleague as an “heir” to the research program is inconsistent with the investigator-initiated structure that is the cornerstone of the R01 funding model.

Comment 3: Suggestions for the specific characteristics for an emeritus award (e.g., number of years of support; definition of a junior faculty partner).

The Genetics Society of America (GSA) believes that priority of such an award mechanism should be to optimize the return on the previous investment made in a research program, such as by allowing senior investigators additional flexibility that could facilitate the transfer of useful research materials to others or to share results of partially completed experiments. For example, NIH program officers could be empowered to offer additional time or flexibility in spending remaining funds in ways that protect the agency’s previous support of the investigator.

We believe that any consideration for emeritus awards should be merit based and dependent upon significant and sustained NIH support for the research program being curtailed. Indeed, we believe that the consideration should be given to the senior investigator and the opportunity for flexibility to spend remaining funding in a way that protects NIH’s previous investments and need not involve junior faculty at all.

Comment 4: Ways in which NIH could incentivize the use of an emeritus award, from the perspectives of both senior investigators and institutions

The Genetics Society of America (GSA) is aware that many academic and research institutions have recognized the need to manage the costs of senior investigators and have created incentives for phased retirement. We urge the NIH to sample such programs to benefit from the wisdom other institutions have gained. We also believe that allowing senior investigators additional flexibility in transferring selected resources and materials will provide them with assurance that their contributions to research shall have lasting value, which may be one concern of investigators as they reach the end of their research careers.

Comment 5: Impediments to the participation in such an award program, from the perspectives of both senior investigators and institutions.

An obvious impediment to investigators would be the loss of salary support for those on soft money positions.

Comment 6: Any additional comments you would like to offer to NIH on this topic.

The Genetics Society of America (GSA) thanks the NIH for creative thinking in addressing the 24% loss of research-funding buying power since 2003. From the GSA's perspective, any program or award that further exacerbates the challenge of investigator-initiated funding—such as R01 awards—should be avoided.



Genetics Society of America

ABOUT GSA: Founded in 1931, the [Genetics Society of America](http://www.genetics-gsa.org) (GSA) is a professional scientific society with more than 5,000 members worldwide working to deepen our understanding of the living world by advancing the field of genetics, from the molecular to the population level. GSA promotes research and fosters communication through a number of GSA-sponsored conferences including regular meetings that focus on particular model organisms. GSA publishes two peer-edited scholarly journals: [GENETICS](#), which has published high quality original research across the breadth of the field since 1916, and [G3: Genes|Genomes|Genetics](#), an open-access journal launched in 2011 to disseminate high quality foundational research in genetics and genomics. The Society also has a deep commitment to education and fostering the next generation of scholars in the field. For more information about GSA, please visit www.genetics-gsa.org. Also follow GSA on Facebook at facebook.com/GeneticsGSA and on Twitter [@GeneticsGSA](https://twitter.com/GeneticsGSA).