

TIPS AND GUIDELINES FOR WRITING A COMPETITIVE INTRAMURAL LOAN REPAYMENT (ILRP) APPLICATION

All NIH full-time equivalent (FTE) researchers who meet the ILRP eligibility criteria are encouraged to visit the [LRP website](#) to initiate an application. Successful applicants carefully craft their application to effectively showcase their work and commitment to research. The guidelines below highlight key criteria and tips for writing a competitive application. Please consider the following:

- 1. Effectively demonstrate your qualifications and commitment to research.** To make your biosketch as effective as possible, showcase your accomplishments confidently - avoid underplaying any significant achievements, such as presentations, workshops, or peer-reviewed publications. Include every professional accolade that reflects your dedication to research, such as awards, appointments, grantsmanship achievements, and collaborations within the NIH and with external researchers, as well as participation in scientific and professional societies. Detail your research experiences at each stage of your education and career, from undergraduate through postgraduate training, to demonstrate your growth and expertise. Clearly outline your career goals, whether you aim to pursue a staff or tenure-track research position at the NIH or intend to move into a clinical or academic research role. Highlight the progress you've made toward these goals. Clinical researchers, especially those with limited peer-reviewed publications, should emphasize their clinical experience and training. It is also advantageous to mention any planned future grant or award applications, such as the Bench-to-Bedside Award, Lasker Award, K-99 Grant, or other NIH Career Development awards. This can further showcase your commitment to advancing in your field.
- 2. Develop a strong research plan.** Structure your research plan and activities in a grant format, including specific aims, methods and research design, and a discussion of anticipated results, potential challenges, and conclusions. Clearly articulate your scientific question, emphasize your project's innovation, and describe its significance. Specify your contributions to the design, implementation, and analysis of the research, as well as your primary role - whether developing the clinical protocol, serving as the first author on publications, or leading an independent or collaborative effort. Detail your research involvement, noting the time commitment required, especially if you have other responsibilities. If proposing multiple projects or phases, indicate when each will take place (e.g., year one versus year two or three). If you are applying to renew your LRP award, you must submit a two-page Research Accomplishment document with your application, outlining your progress since the last award. In this document, and in all research materials, emphasize: (1) research completed during the prior year, (2) your research accomplishments, (3) the current focus of your research, (4) completed training or technical advancements, and (5) your commitment to a research career, including grant applications or positions you plan to pursue within the year.
- 3. Collaborate and involve your mentor(s).** All ILRP applicants are considered mentored research scientists, regardless of their level of seniority or where they are in their career. Thus, it is highly recommended that you work with your mentor(s) in the construction of your research documents. Make sure that you have someone, preferably your mentor, read your application prior to submission. You may also require your mentor(s) assistance to effectively communicate resources and support available to you. If you have more than one mentor, clearly define the role each mentor will play.
- 4. Carefully review your application.** Have someone, ideally your mentor, read over your application prior to submission. Make sure it's thoroughly proofread for content, grammar, typos, and style.
- 5. Ensure a positive overall impression.** ILRP reviewers assess your overall research potential, considering all of the factors listed above. To improve your chances of receiving an LRP award, ensure that each element of your application aligns cohesively and reinforces your strengths.

6. **Select an individual(s) to write strong reference letter(s).** For a new LRP application, you will need three to five reference letters, one of which must be from your LRP mentor/supervisor. Choose senior colleagues who know your research or training well; they do not need to be from the NIH. Renewal LRP applications only require a single reference letter from your LRP mentor/supervisor. LRP reference letters significantly influence your review score, thus it is important to provide your referees with the necessary information to highlight your skills and dedication as a researcher. If you are an early-career researcher with few or no publications, ask your referees to address this and emphasize qualities like your enthusiasm, diligence, and commitment to a research career. For renewal applicants, update your mentor on your recent achievements, including career milestones, conferences, presentations, and publications, so that the letter reflects your progress accurately. Finally, be sure to give your referees ample time to prepare their letters.

Common reasons why LRP applications are not funded:

1. Weak or lukewarm reference letters.
2. Questionable research commitment. Sometimes, reviewers do not get a sense of your commitment to research. This occurs frequently with junior applicants. If your accomplishments are limited, make sure your application reflects your strong commitment to research and that the reference letters attest to this.
3. Mediocre research plan and written language skills.
4. Rushed application. The application process is straightforward and the LRP Information Center (866.849.4047) is available to aid applicants up until the deadline; however, last minute submissions are not a good idea and tend to fare poorly.
5. Inadequate research environment that is not conducive to your research aspirations.
6. A poor publication record without explanation.