

Guidelines for ECOR Deliberative Interim Support (ISF) Applicants

ISF funding is intended to preserve valuable research programs at MGH that are suffering due to the harsh funding climate, giving investigators a chance to retool their applications for resubmission. Research grant applications that were not funded but have a high significance, high potential scientific impact, and stand a good chance of being funded after resubmission (whether as a revised or new grant application) are prioritized for ISF support. Here are some guidelines to consider when submitting your application for ISF Deliberative support. These general guidelines are intended to help you submit a complete and competitive application.

1) Scientific quality as judged by outside review panel: Most NIH grant applications will be outside of the specific scientific expertise of the ISF review panel. ISF reviewers rely on study section summary statements to guide their scientific assessment. ISF reviewers look for evidence of significance, impact, scientific quality, and enthusiasm for the proposed research in the study section comments. Grant applications where the study section reviewers are positive about at least some of the aims suggest a chance for successful resubmission. Conversely, complete lack of enthusiasm or statements that the work lacks significance are indicators of a rough road ahead and need to be specifically addressed in the Introduction / response to review.

2) Response to review: A well articulated Response to review is a key factor in ranking ISF proposals. A complete and thorough response, whether it is with new data, or removal of troublesome aims, or by a well-reasoned rebuttal, is a strong indicator of the likelihood of success. A partial response or an argumentative or dismissive rebuttal indicates a lack of productive dialog with the study section and is not likely to lead to success upon resubmission. These factors weigh on ISF reviewers judgment of an ISF application.

3) Applicant's research trajectory: ISF reviewers also evaluate the research trajectory of an investigator. Reviewers use the NIH review comments as well as the Biosketch and the chair's letter to assess the Scientific standing of the principle investigator in their field. A strong publication record, institutional and national leadership roles, and evidence of strong grant submission activity indicates a highly productive research program.

4) Importance to the department and institution: Does the letter of support from your Division Chief indicate that you are a valued member of the department? Does your research program influence or support other research programs in the department? Have you provided valuable service to the department or institution? These factors impact the overall value of your research program to MGH. If possible you should provide at least an outline of your scientific and service contributions to the department to your letter writer well ahead of the deadline.

5) Financial need: A major priority of ISF support is to extend a lifeline to struggling labs that may be doing highly significant and innovative science but are currently facing gaps in funding. The Other Support page is evaluated to obtain a snapshot view of the applicants' financial need. In some cases applicants with significant other support may be judged as less in need of ISF support. On the other hand, ISF support may be given to labs for specific projects to retain junior personnel whose positions are dependent on project funding. While there is no set policy on financial need, highly valued research programs and investigators that face termination without support are usually prioritized for ISF support. Please make it clear how your current funding is allocated, and how the ISF grant will impact your program and personnel.

In sum, each ISF application represents a complex interplay of review criteria. Weighing these factors and making comparisons between ISF applications is a difficult task. Nonetheless, we as MGH researchers are fortunate to have interim support programs that allow us to preserve and perpetuate outstanding science, representing the rich diversity of MGH research.