

Understanding NIH Individual Mentored Career Development (K) Awards (CDAs)

Purpose

The objective of NIH Career Development (K) programs is to help ensure that a diverse pool of highly trained scientists are available in adequate numbers and in appropriate research areas to address the Nation's biomedical, behavioral, and clinical research needs. Individual Mentored K award programs (CDAs) provide protected time for supervised career development experiences with the **goal of leading to research independence**.

As described in [NIH's Grants Policy Statement](#):

"Individual mentored CDAs (e.g. K01, K07, K08, K22, K23, K25, K99/ROO) provide support for a sustained period of "protected time"(generally three, four or five years) for intensive research career development under the guidance of an experienced mentor or sponsor in the biomedical, behavioral or clinical services. Through the sustained period of research career development and training provided by mentored CDAs, recipients are expected to gain the skills and experience necessary for independent and productive research careers."

While award requirements, terms and conditions vary by NIH Institute/Center (IC) and by award mechanism (<https://researchtraining.nih.gov/programs/career-development>), all K awards require that the institution guarantee substantial "protected time" for K awardees throughout the life of the award (including any approved no cost extension period).

This guidance aims to provide information to support compliance with applicable K award terms and conditions.

Effort Commitment

For most mentored K award programs, the K awardee must commit a *minimum of 9 person months*, (75% full-time professional effort), directly to the career development and research objectives of the program specified in the Notice of Funding Opportunity ("NOFO"). **

The remaining effort (up to 25% full-time professional effort) can be devoted to additional research, clinical and teaching activities **only if those activities are consistent with the goals of the mentored K award** (i.e., the recipient's development into an independent investigator). While the overall goal of the K award is to help the Recipient develop into an independent investigator, the specific aims of the research project must be considered as well.

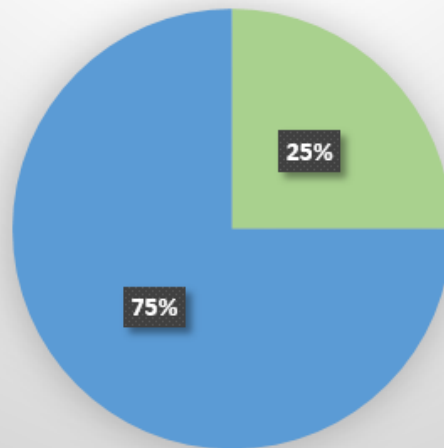
**Note: Some NIH Institutes/Centers (IC) allow less than 9 calendar months. Applicants should consult the NOFO and IC Program Staff to determine if this exception may apply.

Compensated Effort on Unrelated Research

For effort not directly committed to the CDA, (up to 25% full-time professional effort) K awardees may devote effort, **with compensation**, from Federal or non-Federal research projects as Principal Investigator, or in another role (e.g., Co-Investigator), as long the specific aims of the other supporting project(s) **differ from those of the K award**.

100% Full-Time Professional Percent Effort for K award PIs

75% minimum devoted to K award
(50% minimum for certain clinical specialties). *Salary supplementation* must be from non-Federal source



Up to 25% not devoted to K award. *Salary compensation* may be from Federal grant or non-Federal source, including salary support for research, teaching or clinical duties.

Complementary Effort (Related Research)

K awardees may provide **complementary effort without salary support** on other research projects that include **related research between the K award and the research grant**. The percent effort on the research grant is subsumed within the required effort of the K award. However, there must be no significant duplication of the scope of the research supported by the K award and the related research must be consistent with the goals and objectives of the K award (i.e., the recipient's development into an independent investigator).

Example: 75% effort & salary on the K award (includes 10% effort devoted to related research project)
25% clinical time/income

Salary Support

NIH limits the amount of salary that can be expensed to a K award. This limit is on salary only. Fringe Benefits may be applied in addition to the salary. Salary limits vary by NIH IC and can be found in the NOFO. Salary dollars requested in the K award funding proposal must be based on the applicant's institutional base salary (IBS) in effect at the time of application and must be prorated for their commitment on the CDA project.

The portion of K award salary, commensurate with the mandatory effort, not recovered from the K award due to NIH budget restrictions (**salary supplementation/cost sharing**) must be paid by the University up to the level of the K awardee's IBS, must be from non-Federal unrestricted sources, and must not require extra duties or responsibilities that interfere with the goals of the K award (i.e., transition to fully independent research awards).

Example: IBS = \$250,000, K award budget cap is \$100,000

75% salary = \$187,750

\$100,000 is the maximum salary to charge to the K Award GR5

\$87,750 of salary must be paid from non-federal source (cost shared)

Concurrent Support During the Final 2 Years of the Individual Mentored K-award (see [section 12.3.6.2 of the NIH Grants Policy Statement](#) for further information).

Provided the K awardee remains in a mentored status, during the final 2 years of a 3-5 year mentored K award, NIH policy provides a transitional period to permit the K awardee to apply for and (if awarded), lead, an **independent research project**. If the mentored K awardee successfully competes as **the PD/PI of a peer-reviewed research award or a project leader on a competing multi-project award** from NIH or any other Federal agency, K awardees are permitted to reduce the effort devoted to the aims of the K award project from a minimum of 75% full time professional effort (9 person months) to a minimum of 50% full time professional effort (6 person months). As noted above, the recipient must remain in a mentored relationship. While the effort on the K award may be reduced to as low as 50% full time professional effort, the total research effort of the K awardee across all projects must be at least 75% (full time professional effort) per year for the duration of the mentored K award. Any request to rebudget funds associated with a reduction of effort on the K award requires prior approval from the NIH Grants Management Specialist. ORPA will submit this request on behalf of the K awardee.

