OppNet K18s: Answers to frequently-asked questions

Why should I apply for a K18 when I'm an established investigator?

Unlike NIH research awards (e.g., R01, R21), K18s finance dedicated time for an investigator to learn principles, approaches, and methodologies beyond that researcher's primary discipline. The heightened wisdom a researcher acquires as the result of such short-term, intensive experiences can lead to the difference between a principal investigator who collaborates with an interdisciplinary team to an investigator who is a "catalyst of scientific interdisciplinarity," to quote founding OBSSR Director Norman Anderson.

This K18 also corresponds with current OBSSR Director Bill Riley's vision to help develop "a more cumulative and integrated approach to behavioral and social sciences," and to infuse behavioral and social sciences into more biomedically-focused health research and practice. NIH seldom issues funding opportunities designed for established researchers to expand their intellectual skillset—let alone to integrate behavioral, biological, and/or social sciences.

Must I be on sabbatical to apply?

Not necessarily. Your application package will need to demonstrate your availability to dedicate your NIH-funded time to your K18-related career-development activities.

Do I need a history of NIH funding to qualify?

A record of previous NIH funding is not necessarily required, and applicants *needn't* have current funding in order to apply. That said, applicants should have a record of independent, peer-reviewed funding (e.g., foundation, other federal agency), as the NIH created other K awards for investigators striving to begin a research career. If you have *no history* of research funding, you may consider other types of NIH career development awards: https://researchtraining.nih.gov/programs/career-development

What does "mid-career" mean?

Mid-career generally equates to investigators at the associate professor-level or similar who seek to extend their scientific knowledge beyond their current expertise that not only will allow them to learn about new scientific areas but also will enhance their competitiveness for future NIH funding.

What is the track record of past OppNet K18 recipients?
By 2019, there have been approximately 30 OppNet K18 awards. Of those, 60 percent received one or more R01 or R01-equivalent (e.g., U01, R34, P30, P50) NIH grant. Also noteworthy is that 41 percent of these subsequent grants were directly related to the training that PIs' received through their OppNet K18-funded training experiences and collaborations. These findings are the result of analyzing NIH RePORTer textual data, not self-report from grantees.

What's the average time between an OppNet K18 award and a subsequent, related NIH research grant?
The median is three years from the receipt of an OppNet K18 to the receipt of a NIH research award related to the K18 training project—relatively brief.

Did this cohort report other benefits?
During qualitative interviews, OppNet K18 grantees cited (alphabetically),
- Academic career advancement
- Broadened research scope
- New collaborations for publications and funding opportunities
- Recognition from their professional associations and peers
- Unique data to inform publications and/or preliminary analysis for grant applications (Pomeroy-Carter et al., 2018)

Who can be my mentor?
Simply put, any expert with whom you have not collaborated closely to date and who has expertise that will enhance your own. Your proposed mentor(s) should be accomplished in the scientific area(s) you'd like to develop. Proposed mentor(s) may be at your own institution or elsewhere.

Should I have an established relationship with the proposed mentor?
Not really, to be frank. OppNet's purpose for this FOA is to help researchers develop new expertise, partnerships, and collaborations. Your mentor must be someone with whom you have *not* published or presented previously, though it's certainly possible you might be acquainted with this researcher and/or the potential mentor's work.

Nevertheless, applicants must work closely with the mentor to develop your application's career development component. The application should document the mentor's qualifications, availability, research facilities, previous experience as a research supervisor, plan for nature of mentoring, and a plan to monitor the candidate's research. Obviously, the mentor's role should correspond with the K18 candidate's plan for her/his career. These components may appear in the application, the mentor's letter, or both.

Must I travel to learn with/from this mentor?

Not necessarily. Past grantees have travelled to work in other labs, they have gained expertise virtually, or used a combination to achieve their career-development goals. The experience and knowledge you want to receive likely will influence the timing and location.

Does the K18 provide financial support for mentors?

No, the K18 only provides salary support for the candidate; however, the mentor may benefit from future collaborations with the candidate as well as gain new insights into the mentor's current research projects through interactions with the K18 candidate.

What kind of career-development activities are appropriate?

Didactic training, individual mentoring sessions, online coursework, and/or hands-on experiences are some of the possibilities to propose as part of the career development plan. Ask the scientific contact affiliated with the Institute(s) or Center(s) whose names and contact information appear on the FOA.

What constitutes an appropriate career-development project?

The scope of work proposed must be appropriate for a career development experience within one year or less. Examples include analysis of current or secondary data, and small ancillary studies embedded within the mentor's ongoing research. Approaches that involve biological, mixed, qualitative, quantitative, and electronic sensor data are welcome.

OppNet understands that there are many possibilities for projects in pursuit of new knowledge and skills in basic psychological processes, sociological processes, and/or biomedical pathways. The multiple possibilities constitute one reason that there are three versions of this FOA through which you may submit one application. Once you have a short description of your project, send it to at least one scientific contact associated with the Institute(s) or Center(s) you are targeting for your application.

Are travel costs allowable?

Yes, so long as the travel costs relate to the candidate's career-development plan.

Where can I find past successful OppNet K18 projects?

Click [URL TBD here] for a list of all OppNet-funded K18 projects alphabetically by project title. The "Abstract" leads to all information about that project in NIH RePORTer.

There are three versions of this FOA. Which version is right for me?

There are multiple reasons for these versions, including OppNet's interest in the underlying mechanisms and processes that inform health-related behaviors, NIH's efforts to improve rigor and reproducibility in science, and current Federal Policy for the Protection of Human Subjects ('Common Rule'). There is **no** *Clinical Trials Required* version of this FOA as NIH precludes OppNet from inviting intervention-development studies.

- ***Basic Experimental Studies with Humans Required (BESH):*** Research career-development work with humans that seeks to understand the fundamental aspects of human phenomena
- ***Independent Clinical Trial Not Allowed:*** Research career-development projects on underlying mechanisms and processes of human health-related behaviors that are ancillary to a mentor's intervention-related project(s)
- ***No Independent Clinical Trials:*** Research career-development projects that involve, for example, deidentified secondary data or model animals

References

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- Pomeroy-Carter, C.A., Williams, S.R., Han, X., Elwood, W.N., & Zuckerman, B.L. (2018). Evaluation of a mid-career investigator career-development award: Assessing the ability of OppNet K18 awardees to obtain NIH follow-on research funding. *PLoS One,* 1-13.
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