

New study identifies gaps in NIH funding success rates for black researchers

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Black scientists were significantly less likely than their white counterparts to receive research funding from the National Institutes of Health, according to an analysis of data from 2000 to 2006.

University of Kansas Professor of Economics Donna Ginther was the lead author on the study commissioned by the NIH, which appears in the Aug. 19 issue of *Science*.

The researchers found a 10 percentage point [gap](#) in research funding -- even after taking into consideration demographics, education and training, employer characteristics, NIH experience and research productivity. For example, for every 100 grants submitted to NIH, 30 grants from white applicants were funded, compared to 20 grants for black applicants.

"In order to improve the [health outcomes](#) of all Americans, it's important for the biomedical workforce to reflect the diversity of the population," Ginther said. "As the population becomes increasingly diverse, we will continue to get further from that goal unless the research community intervenes.

"NIH grants support research into treatments and cures for diseases such as cancer and diabetes. Such research often has a strong [economic impact](#), as well, because it often leads to new laboratories, job growth and spin-off companies."

Applications for NIH funding go through [peer review](#) that considers the significance, innovation and approach of grant applications, the investigator(s) and the research environment. About half of the applications are determined to be worth scoring. Among those scored, budgets and NIH Institutes priorities determine which applications are funded. Priorities can vary by year and by Institute. The study found that applications from black researchers were less likely to be scored and on average had worse scores. After controlling for the score of the grant, there were no race or ethnicity differences in funding.

Applicants self-identify race, ethnicity and gender, but that information is not available during the peer review. However, biographical facts that are included in the review materials can provide clues to the identity of the applicants.

The research suggests it is possible that cumulative advantage may explain the funding differences.

"Small differences in access to research resources and mentoring during training or at the beginning of a career may accumulate to become large between-group differences," the paper says.

Additionally, the paper suggests further research is needed to determine why black researchers are less likely to be funded.

"When we started this study, we expected to find plausible explanations for the race/ethnicity funding gaps that we observed," Ginther said.

"After almost three years of work and countless reviews of the evidence, we do not have the complete explanation for the [funding](#) gap. I applaud NIH's willingness to publish these results and take concrete steps to address this problem."

Provided by University of Kansas

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