

# Analysis details racial inequity and corrective strategies in research grant funding

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An analysis by Nicholas Gilpin, Ph.D., Professor of Physiology and Associate Director of the Alcohol and Drug Abuse Center of Excellence at LSU Health New Orleans School of Medicine, and Michael Taffe,

Ph.D., Professor of Psychiatry at the University of California San Diego, summarizes long-standing racial inequities in federal funding for biosciences research from the National Institutes of Health (NIH). Their report describes prior failures to correct these racial inequities and offers strategies that may be effective in eliminating these disparities. Their paper, published online in the open-access science journal, *eLife*, is available for download [here](#).

"There is structural racism at all levels of the biomedical research enterprise," notes Dr. Gilpin, who is also Vice-Chair of Research in Physiology at LSU Health New Orleans. "One of the most overt examples of this is in the fact that white scientists are 1.7 times more likely to receive federal research grants than Black scientists, even when controlling for a long list of potential mediating variables. This disparity was reported in 2011, and in 2019 it was confirmed that nothing has changed during the last decade."

The authors describe the impact that racial disparities in federal funding rates have on both biomedical scientists of color and the field at large. They also issue a call to action to leaders at the National Institutes of Health (NIH) and universities, grant reviewers, tenured faculty, and search and tenure committee members.

"Put simply, this is unacceptable," adds Dr. Gilpin. "The NIH must acknowledge its own systemic and structural racism and must take action to eliminate it. This action must be demanded by all scientists, but especially by those that are NOT adversely affected by the policy, that is, by scientists that are white, tenured, and in leadership positions."

The authors maintain that federal research dollars are the primary form of "career currency" in academic research, and that racial disparities in [federal funding](#) have many negative trickle-down effects on the careers of Black scientists and the biomedical sciences at-large. The authors

evaluate [current approaches](#) to address the problem and show why these strategies are unlikely to achieve success on their own. They recommend adding additional strategies that include increased data transparency, using paylines to reduce disparities and employing a top-down approach previously used to help early-stage investigators in the biomedical sciences.

"The United States is having a reckoning with the pervasive and oppressive structural racism that permeates nearly all of its institutions," Dr. Gilpin concludes. "Although this has been going on for centuries, this seems like a bellwether moment in our society because these ideas have entered the [collective consciousness](#) and mobilized sections of U.S. society that previously stayed on the sidelines."

Although progress has been made to increase the participation of historically underrepresented groups in biomedical training stages, the National Institutes of Health acknowledges that members of these groups are still less likely to be hired as independently funded faculty researchers. To address that need, in December, the NIH announced two new funding opportunities that will provide support to institutions to recruit diverse groups of early-stage research faculty and prepare them to thrive as NIH-funded researchers.

**More information:** Michael A Taffe et al, Equity, Diversity and Inclusion: Racial inequity in grant funding from the US National Institutes of Health, *eLife* (2021). [DOI: 10.7554/eLife.65697](https://doi.org/10.7554/eLife.65697)

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