

Capitol Connection

NIH offers new grant for non-academic career training

March 25, 2013 | Author: Summer Allen, Graduate and Postdoc, Brown University



The NIH is launching a new grant program that seeks to prepare graduate students and postdoctoral researchers for diverse careers. This program is part of the [NIH's response](#) to the findings of the [Biomedical Research Task Force](#), which found that more than half of science trainees earning PhDs in the United States end up in non-academic careers.

The [Broadening Experiences in Scientific Training \(BEST\)](#) program is a pilot grant that will be awarded to up to 15 institutions in the 2013 fiscal year. Because this is a pilot program, institutions are encouraged to propose “new and innovative methods for preparing graduate students for the full breadth of research and research-related careers in the biomedical, behavioral, social, or clinical sciences.” The program announcement specifically encourages institutions to partner up with organizations that have scientists as employees so trainees have opportunities to connect with these people through internships or special seminars.

Because graduate and postdoctoral training in the biomedical sciences is already quite long, as the Task Force also reported, BEST proposals are not supposed to lengthen training but should instead be fully integrated with existing programs. Another important point is that exposure to other career paths should occur early in training.

While I have been frustrated by the NIH's inaction on some of the larger Task Force recommendations (I agree with [Paula Stephan](#) that those larger changes would have the greatest impact on career prospects for biomed PhDs), I am heartened by the introduction of the BEST program. What I've seen as the biggest pitfalls for my friends and colleagues attempting the leap to non-academic careers are a lack of tangible experience in different fields (as could be accomplished with internships) and a dearth of contacts outside academia (which would also ideally be developed through this program).

I also like that the NIH is treating this program as a set of experiments—just like good scientists! Institutions are expected to present the goals of their programs clearly and to track and report program outcomes. Ideally the NIH will use the data from these 15 pilot grants to expand and strengthen future programs.

Interested in learning more about the BEST program? The [NIH is hosting a webinar on March 26th](#), and you can submit questions now that may be answered during the webinar. And for tangible ideas for non-academic training that could be incorporated into a BEST proposal, I direct you [here](#) and [here](#).

1 comment

PAUL FROHNA

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After having my pharmacology PhD thesis advisers and most of the UPENN graduate faculty warned me of the dark side of industry while in school, which made it all the more interesting when I met many of them years later as employees of biotech and pharma companies. Apparently not so dark after all! Will be nice to see more balanced programs that prepare grads for a variety of careers considering how challenging the job market is and the limited number of academic position. I have started my own consulting firm after years in biotech (www.frohnabiotechconsulting.com), which was on the job training that could have been accelerated with courses/programs designed to teach me about the biotech industry. Glad to see that the NIH is stepping up to this challenge!