



Navigating a Career in Government: Obtaining a Position and Preparing for Tenure

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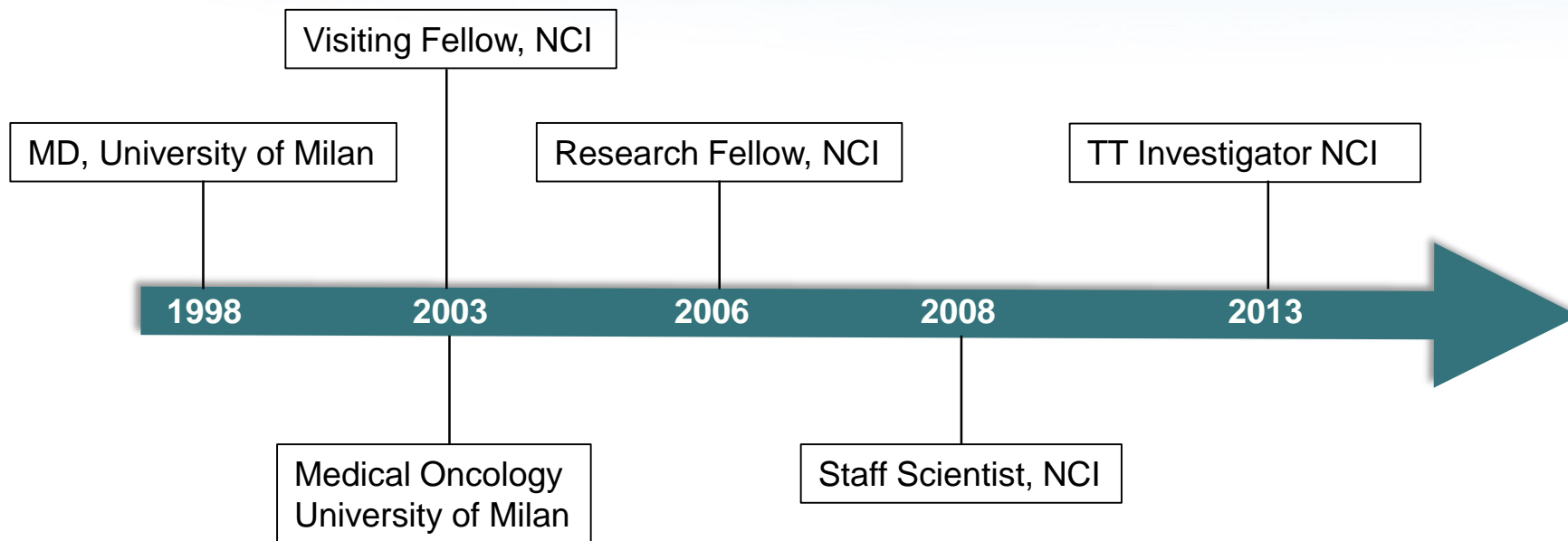
Intramural Research Program

Our Research Changes Lives

one program
many people
infinite possibilities



Growing within the NIH intramural Program my personal experience



Tips for Getting into the NIH

- ❑ Develop a Thick Skin and a Hopeful Attitude, While Learning the System
 - Typically 2-5 times as many qualified applicants as there are openings
 - Don't give up if you get a few rejection notices



Tips for Getting into the NIH

- Although Many Research Positions are Advertised, Many are Not

Advertised Postdoc positions

https://www.training.nih.gov/career_services/postdoc_jobs_nih

(These people have space and resources)

You may search our intramural database by topic to find an appropriate match and contact that person

directly <http://intramural.nih.gov/search/index.tml>

Also see: <http://irp.nih.gov/our-research/scientific-focus-areas>

A customized letter of introduction, expressing an interest in the PI's area of expertise is better than a generic request for a position



Universal Tips for Finding a Position

- ❑ Start looking early (Thanksgiving for Summer, 1 yr for med/grad sch/postdoc, 2 yrs. for real job).
- ❑ Make direct contact with professors, selecting officials or contacts listed in ad
- ❑ Talk to people who hold the job or position you want and ask them how they got there
- ❑ Hit the ground running in every position, because you will get the next one based on what you accomplish in the first months or years of the current position



Questions to ask of a Potential Lab Supervisor

- ❑ **1. What happened to the last 5 postdocs (or students) who went through your lab?** Did they get first-author publications? Did they present their work outside the lab? Where are they now?

- ❑ **2. Who will be responsible for my day to day training?** i.e. if I need to know how to use the autoclave or the microscope, whose responsibility is it to show me?

- ❑ **3. What will my project(s) be?**

- ❑ **4. Visit the lab before committing.** Also, try to speak with the fellows in the absence of the boss. Try to find to find out about the lab and local environment.



Also Be Prepared to Answer Questions

- What are your career goals?
- Where do you see yourself 10 years from now?
- What research have you done? (you need a 30 second, 5 minute and 15 minute response to this question)
- What techniques do you know?
- What do you expect to learn or accomplish during this fellowship?



Tips for progressing your career within the NIH

#1 Be seen as someone who:

- Works hard
- Helps others
- Learns from mistakes (yours and others)
- Accepts criticism
- Shows up on time ready to work
- Doesn't complain about doing extra work



Tips for progressing your career within the NIH

#2 Do Not Underestimate the Value of Social Capital

- Socialize with people who enjoy science
- Talk to senior investigators
- Participate in interest group activities
- Sign up for lunches with speakers
- Participate in Science Events (WALS, Grand Rounds etc.)



Tips for progressing your career within the NIH

#3 The Importance of Having Multiple Mentors

- Thriving within any organization requires a lot of information.
- No single person has all the information you need to survive.
- Spreading out your questions generates the illusion of independence.



Paths to tenure-track

□ Recent doctoral graduates → *Early Independent Scientists*

□ Post-docs

Research/Clinical Fellows

Assistant Clinical Investigators → *Tenure-Track Investigator*

Staff Scientists/Clinicians



Tenure-track Investigator search

- ❑ Traditional, targeted search
- ❑ Earl Stadtman search
- ❑ Lasker Clinical Research Scholars search



Traditional Targeted Search

- ❑ The Intramural Research Program typically hires about 30 PIs per year
- ❑ Approx. 1/3 of hires looking for best scientist in broad field
- ❑ Frequently top candidates from one search would all be hired by multiple ICs over a period of years
- ❑ Sometimes missed opportunities in novel areas



Advantages of the Earl Stadtman Investigator Search

- ❑ Broad search open to all biomedical and behavioral researchers
- ❑ A chance to identify and assess demographics of all individuals interested in being an NIH Tenure Track Investigator
- ❑ Areas not limited
- ❑ Opportunity to increase diversity of hires



Challenges to the Earl Stadtman Investigator Search

- ❑ Development of broad criteria and categories
- ❑ Coordination of 200 committee members spread over 20 subcommittees
- ❑ Top committee picks do not always get selected by SDs, due to areas of interest and/or lack of resources



Factors NIH Considers When Hiring PIs

- Publication Record
- Letters of Recommendation
- The quality and innovation shown in previous work and research plan
- Your ability to describe your work in writing and orally
- Potential impact on public health
- Reputation of labs/institutions where you have worked
- Board Certifications (for M.D.s)
- Can you make use of a diverse and collaborative environment?
- Do you possess a unique combination of skill sets?



Official Criteria for Tenure

- **High quality, originality and impact of scientific contributions to a specific field and biomedical research more generally**
- **Independent creative effort**
 - Independent research as evidenced by primary and senior authorship on original research publications
 - For team research, clear evidence of distinct intellectual contribution to the research; members of research teams should demonstrate peer recognition of their specific contributions and some publications should highlight their distinctive research
- **Productivity relative to resources**
- **National/international recognition and leadership**



Official Criteria for Tenure

- **Mentorship abilities and activities**

Success in training and mentoring junior colleagues at all levels and from diverse backgrounds, as evidenced by their professional progress, competitive funding and/or publications

- **High ethical standards and integrity in directing and conducting research**

- **NIH citizenship, collegiality and promotion of diversity**



Take home message

- Work hard
- Publish (Good mix of quality/quantity)
- Find your way to stick around
- Be ready when opportunities come up

