

**NIH SURE PROGRAM**

## Frequently Asked Questions

The National Institutes of Health (NIH) designed the **SuRE program** to help qualifying institutions on their path toward building and sustaining a research infrastructure. And in partnership, the **SuRE Resource Center** provides free training, guidance, and expertise to help bridge the gap in taking those initial steps.

Contact a Coordinator

Additional questions? Reach out to one of our Regional Coordinators for assistance. They can assess your institutional and Principal Investigator eligibility and direct more nuanced questions to the correct NIGMS personnel, who ultimately have the final decision.

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## Eligibility

**1. Are the institutional requirements the same as they were for SCORE grants?**

No, the requirements for these two funding mechanisms are different. To be eligible for the SuRE program, institutions must have less than \$6 million in NIH RGP funding and greater than 25% of Pell-eligible students in the previous two years; professional schools with a historical mission of serving minority students are also eligible. The institutional information for the SuRE program is also different, requiring two letters of support — one from the Provost or President and one from the Department Chair or Dean. A demographic table showing % of underrepresented students is not needed, as was the case with the old SCORE mechanism.

**2. Do all grant types count toward calculating the annual NIH funding eligibility requirement of less than \$6M?**

No, awards that count toward the \$6M threshold are **Research Project Grants** (RPGs) such as R01, R15, R16, R21, R35, R56, U01, DP1, DP2, but not Training (T32, T34), Infrastructure (S10), Research Center (P20, P30, P50) or Specialized Center (U54) type grants.

**3. Are the SuRE R16 mechanisms only for tenure-track faculty?**

When applying for an R16 grant, the Principal Investigator (PI) must have a full-time tenured or tenure-track (or equivalent) faculty appointment at the applicant institution and be eligible to apply for NIH research project grants. See Section III: Eligibility [at this link](#).

**4. Is an Assistant Professor with no previous NIH grants qualified to apply for a SuRE grant?**

Yes, such a person would qualify for a SuRE grant ([PAR-21-169](#)). A Professor at any level will also qualify for a SuRE-First ([PAR-21-173](#)) if they have yet to be a Principal Investigator (PI) of an externally funded, peer-reviewed research grant from any source. Being a co-Investigator (co-I) of a grant does not negate eligibility.

*Eligibility continued***5. May I submit a SuRE or SuRE-First application with a co-Investigator (co-I) who does have other NIH funding?**

Yes. You may include a co-Investigator(s) with other NIH funding on your application. However, Multiple Principal Investigator (MPI) grants are not allowed with SuRE and SuRE-First applications.

**6. Can an applicant apply to SuRE (PAR-21-169) and SuRE-First (PAR-21-173) with two proposals simultaneously within the same year?**

No, an applicant can only have one pending application (SuRE or SuRE-First) simultaneously. Also, note that each SuRE funding mechanism has a single annual deadline.

**7. Is a Principal Investigator (PI) eligible to apply for a SuRE grant if they were a PI on an NIH-funded R21 proposal five years ago?**

If the grant is no longer active, you would be eligible to apply for a SuRE grant, but you would no longer be eligible to apply for a SuRE-First grant.

**8. Regarding SuRE-First eligibility, can a senior faculty with no previous NIH grants apply for SuRE-First? Can they be a mentor for a SuRE-First application?**

Yes, they can apply for a SuRE-First grant if they had no previously externally funded, peer-reviewed grants as a PI (NIH or other). And yes, they could also serve as a mentor. Please note that a SuRE-First applicant would want a mentor with previous NIH research experience since this would look good to the reviewers.

**9. Who can be a mentor for a SuRE-First application?**

An established investigator at a domestic institution who is an expert in the applicant's area of research can be a mentor for a SuRE-First application. Ideally, the mentor should have a strong publication record and a track record of funding (preferably NIH) for their research. A history of trainees in their own lab is also desirable. The mentor may or may not be at the applicant's institution but cannot be at a foreign institution. More than one mentor is allowed. In addition, the mentor should demonstrate a strong interest in the SuRE-First applicants' professional development toward an independent research career.

**10. If a school only serves master's and doctoral students and has a separate research support office yet is part of a university system with undergraduates, is this school qualified for SuRE?**

There are several eligibility requirements to qualify for SuRE R16 grants. Please contact the SuRE Resource Center if you are unsure about your school's eligibility.

**11. Is a pharmacy school faculty member eligible for a SuRE grant?**

Yes, a faculty member in an accredited medical or health professional school with a historical mission statement to educate Underrepresented Minority (URM) students may apply for a SuRE R16 grant as long as other eligibility criteria are met.

*Eligibility continued***12. If underrepresented students must be involved in the funded research, should they be named in the application? Additionally, is there a penalty if you fail to recruit underrepresented students?**

You may identify students, but this is not required. While naming students is not necessary to fund the research, the Research Strategy of your application must include a Student Involvement Plan (1/4 to 1/2 pg) with strategies to recruit students, including Underrepresented Minority (URM) students.

**13. Are pharmacy students eligible for inclusion in an R16 grant proposal?**

Yes, if they can be justified, it is acceptable to include pharmacy students.

**14. Is there any restriction regarding the years after a PhD for SuRE (PAR-21-169) versus SuRE-First (PAR-21-173)?**

No, there is not. Eligibility restrictions apply if you are currently, or have previously been, a Principal Investigator (PI) of an NIH SC1, SC2, or SC3 SCORE grant — or any peer-reviewed, externally funded federal or non-federal research award. Being a co-Investigator (co-I) or having a career development grant does not exclude your eligibility.

**15. What grant mechanism (R16 or R01) would you recommend for a tenure-track faculty at an R2 institution with a decent publication and grant history (although no prior NIH funding) and a lot of teaching on their plate?**

In this scenario, we recommended an R16. For an R01, you will be competing with faculty at R1 institutions with extensive resources. Also, a lack of prior NIH funding might be considered a negative more so for an R01 grant than for an R16 grant. However, if you have a good amount of preliminary data and can commit the effort to an R01, then consider trying.

**16. Does having another submission with similar Specific Aims pending hurt a SuRE application?**

If you have a pending NIH grant, you can only submit another grant application with the same Aims once you find out the status of the pending grant. You can have a pending grant to another agency (for example, NSF) with the same Aims and still submit to NIH, but if both grants are funded, you can only accept one.

**17. I have an active SCORE SC2 grant. At what point should I apply for the SuRE grant?**

The PI of an active SCORE grant may apply for a SuRE grant in the last year of SCORE funding.

**18. I have an active SCORE SC3 award and was planning on applying to SuRE as a continuation of funds. Can I do that?**

Yes. You can transition an SC3 SCORE to a SuRE, not as a renewal but as a new grant with the same focus. The PI of an active SCORE grant may apply for a SuRE grant in the last year of SCORE funding.

## Collaborator and Student

### **19. Do co-Investigators have to be at SuRE-eligible institutions as well?**

No, co-Investigators (co-I) may be at other institutions, including those that are not SuRE-eligible.

### **20. Can a co-Investigator (co-I) at an R1 institution host a summer student to conduct a part of the project that can't be done at the awardee institution?**

Yes. It is allowable if the trip is necessary to accomplish the specific Aims. However, SuRE's purpose is to help build research infrastructure at the Principal Investigator's (PI) home institution. Therefore, too much of the funding going to a different institution would not align with the goal of the program.

### **21. Can a co-Investigator (co-I) have NIH funding of their own and still participate in a SuRE grant?**

Yes, this is allowable, but since R16 grants have limited funding, co-I's should have minimum effort covered by the grant (<5%).

### **22. What should be the percentage effort for a co-Investigator on a SuRE application?**

The effort and compensation for a co-Investigator (co-I) should be appropriate for their role in the project. However, since R16 grants have limited funding, the effort for co-I's covered by the grant should be minimal (<5%).

### **23. Can a mentor be included as a co-Principal Investigator (co-PI) on a SuRE-First application?**

Please note that NIH does not use the term, co-PI. If several investigators share PI responsibilities, NIH uses the term multi-PI (MPI). For example, if the grant has one PI but other faculty with actual effort, those other faculty are called co-Investigators (co-I). The MPI format is not allowed on R16 applications. However, co-I's are permitted, and the mentor can be included as a co-I.

### **24. A Student Involvement Plan is required for SuRE applications. Is that plan also required for SuRE-First applications?**

Yes, the Research Strategy of both the SuRE and SuRE-First applications must include a Student Involvement Plan. The plan should be ¼ - ½ page in length with strategies to recruit students, including Underrepresented Minority (URM) students.

### **25. Can STEM students be eligible for participation on R16s? Does the student need to be in their second or third year of university?**

Yes, STEM students may participate in an R16. The notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) does not indicate limitations on the level of students that may participate in SuRE-funded research projects.

### **26. Can student researchers be grad students? If so, how many students are appropriate? For example, is one graduate student and one undergrad enough?**

Yes, any number of undergraduate and graduate students is permitted for R16 applications as long as their effort is justified and there are sufficient funds for support, if necessary. The focus of the R16 program is on undergraduate students, but graduate and professional students are welcome to participate.

*Collaborator and  
Student continued*

**27. Can international students be included?**

Yes. The notice of funding opportunity (NOFO) notes that foreign institution/entity involvement is not allowed except as fee-for-service. However, the NOFO does not prohibit international students enrolled at the applicant institution in the US from participating. Keep in mind, SuRE emphasizes the inclusion of students from underrepresented groups.

**28. Can high school students be included in work during the summer?**

Yes. However, priority should be given to undergraduate students.

**29. Can you propose a postdoc in the application?**

Yes. While not strictly prohibited, you will want to consider the budgetary implications of adding a postdoctoral scholar if the postdoc will be supported by the SuRE application. With limited funding, accommodating salary and fringe costs for a postdoc on a SuRE application may use up a considerable amount of the budget. In addition, with student involvement a high priority, you should not include a postdoc if it negatively impacts your ability to meet the student involvement requirement.

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## Proposal Content and Organization

**30. How many paragraphs or pages are recommended for the Student Recruitment section?**

The entire Student Involvement Plan should be about  $\frac{1}{4}$  to  $\frac{1}{2}$  page. It is a part of the Research Strategy, which is limited to six pages with strategies to recruit students, including Underrepresented Minority (URM) students.

**31. Do we need to put a diversity statement in the student training section?**

Student diversity is a priority for the R16 program, so you should state how you will recruit diverse students in your Student Involvement Plan. If your institution offers diversity training, consider including a statement about that, but keep in mind that space is limited; an alternative is for the institutional letter to comment on diversity training.

**32. Should the Specific Aims section make mention of student participation?**

Information on student participation is not recommended for the Specific Aims. Instead, it should be included in the Research Strategy.

**33. Should you utilize bullet points or paragraph formatting when addressing Innovation in your proposal?**

Either approach can work, with bullet points providing a quicker read for the reviewer to see different innovative aspects. Regardless of the format, only include a few. Three to five is generally reasonable. Minor innovations should not dilute the impact of major innovations. One approach to consider is using bullet points with two to three "intellectual" innovations and two to three "technical" innovations.

**34. Is including "Task 1, 2, 3..." within each Aim okay when formatting your Specific Aims?**

Yes, but limit yourself to three Tasks, often referred to as sub-Aims, unless you have a large R01 grant.

**35. What is meant by a "mechanistic" Specific Aim?**

A mechanistic-specific Aim elucidates biological, biochemical, or disease processes. These are reviewed more favorably than a descriptive-specific Aim.

## Proposal Content and Organization continued

### **36. What constitutes a “descriptive” vs. a “mechanistic” grant?**

Descriptive focuses on observations, whereas mechanistic focuses on processes. NIH generally favors a mechanistic approach because those grants tend to understand the underlying basis of biological processes, including disease processes. This knowledge can lead to ways to understand and treat human disease, which is the ultimate goal of NIH research. This is not to say that descriptive studies have no value, but grants based solely on descriptive studies tend to do poorly in NIH study sections. In contrast, exclusively or mainly mechanistic grants tend to do well.

### **37. Can we apply with secondary analysis of data, or is primary data required?**

Reanalysis of data, such as GEO datasets, is allowable and can support the hypothesis and/or proposed experiments. However, for SuRE grants, preliminary data is required. Although preliminary data is not officially required for SuRE-First grants, review panel members like to see data and increased enthusiasm that the PI has the expertise to carry out the proposed studies. These data are often called feasibility data. Note that any data you include should be of sufficient quality and rigor.

### **38. Should we include information about student involvement and training in our Biosketch?**

Yes, for grants like SuRE, where student training is an NIH priority, including this information makes sense. Be sure to emphasize the training of Underrepresented Minority (URM) students, if possible. Section A of the Biosketch is where you can describe your experience with trainees.

### **39. Is a Biosketch required for a mentor on SuRE-First applications? How does a mentor show their mentorship and grant record?**

Yes, a Biosketch for the mentor is required and can demonstrate their mentorship and funding record. The mentor will also write a letter of support. The letter should include a detailed plan on the nature and frequency of interactions with the SuRE-First Principal Investigator (PI) and how progress toward specified milestones will be evaluated, especially the progression toward a sustainable and independent research career.

### **40. Are there page limits for institutional letters?**

Institutional letters have no page limits, but one to two pages is generally reasonable.

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## Budgetary and Other Support

### **41. Other than in the Budget, how is time commitment justified?**

The level of personnel effort on a project is determined by the individual's role and the amount of work they perform. The Budget and Budget Justification are the only places in the application where an individual's level of effort is listed, and their work described. Therefore, the information provided in the Budget justifies the amount of effort being requested.

### **42. Can we ask for student stipends? If so, what is a typical stipend for an undergraduate student?**

Including financial support for students on SuRE applications is acceptable, with the institution determining the amount. The NIH considers those costs essential to conduct the research project. Stipends are only allowed on NIH training grants.

## Budgetary and Other Support continued

### **43. In the Budget, do I have to include evidence of equipment cost?**

It is not required to document equipment costs for a SuRE proposal. However, it is in the Principal Investigator's (PI) and the institution's best interests to ensure that costs in their proposal Budget are as accurate as possible.

### **44. Does current support include training grants that someone is involved in and receives effort?**

Yes, all funding should be included in current support.

### **45. Can you use SuRE funds to travel abroad to perform research at a collaborator's lab?**

No, travel abroad to perform research at a collaborator's lab is not allowed. In addition, SuRE funds may not support any foreign institutions, research services, collaborators, consultants, or components, except fee-for-service.

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## Review Process and Funding

### **46. Are R16 grants reviewed by Special Emphasis Panels at NIGMS like the SCORE grants, or do we submit to a specific institute?**

Per the notice of funding opportunity (NOFO), SuRE and SuRE-First applications are evaluated for scientific and technical merit by the appropriate Scientific Review Group convened by NIGMS and are assigned to Special Emphasis Panels that are clustered into appropriate research areas.

### **47. Can SuRE grants be funded by NIGMS directly, rather than going to NCI, for example?**

R16 SuRE applications in research areas of NIAID will be reviewed and considered for funding by NIAID. All other R16 SuRE applications will be assigned to NIGMS and reviewed by NIGMS Special Emphasis Panels. After the review, all NIH ICs that signed on SuRE NOFO may select meritorious R16 SuRE applications in their supported research areas for funding. If they do so, NIGMS will transfer selected applications to those NIH ICs. NIGMS will fund all other meritorious applications.

### **48. What range of impact scores are expected to be in the fundable range?**

Different study sections have different ranges, so it varies. Some NIH funding mechanisms, such as R01 and R21 grants, provide percentile rankings, which can help determine the likelihood of funding. However, R16 grants are given impact scores as opposed to percentiles.

### **49. How competitive are the SuRE grants (percent of applicants funded) compared to other NIH grant opportunities such as SCORE?**

You may find NIH success rates [at this link](#). In the program's first year (FY 2022) success rates were 44% and 48% for SuRE and SuRE-First grants, respectively. It is not known whether this success rate will change in future years.

### **50. If SuRE is too new for success rate data to be publicly available, how competitive were the predecessor SCORE grants compared to other mechanisms?**

Success rates vary based on a variety of factors. To view data on FY21 data (organized by IC and activity code), [visit this NIH link](#).



**51. Is it correct that the funding amounts the NIH disburses per year are different for R16 and R15 mechanisms?**

Success rates for R15 vary between institutes and are likely to change from year to year. SuRE grants' success rates in the program's first year (FY 2022) were 44% and 48% for SuRE and SuRE-First grants, respectively.

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**General****52. What are the differences and similarities between R16 (SuRE, SuRE-First) and the R15 (AREA and REAP) grants, and what are the success rates?***Differences:*

R15 grants (AREA and REAP) are for accredited public or non-profit private schools that grant baccalaureate or advanced degrees in health professions or advanced degrees in biomedical and behavioral sciences. R16 SuRE grants require that institutions must have at least 25% of undergrads supported by Pell grants and less than \$6 million in NIH RPG funding for the previous two years or be an accredited medical/health professional school with a historical mission statement that explicitly states that it was founded to educate Underrepresented Minority (URM) students.

There is no limit on how many R15 grants an institution can hold, and there are three deadlines a year. An institution can have up to 20 active SuRE grants (including SC1 and SC2), which has one deadline a year. There is no limit on the number of SuRE-First grants an institution can have.

*Similarities:*

There are limits on how much NIH funding may be received by an institution (\$6 million/year), but how this is determined is slightly different and can be found on the NIH website.

Success for REAP grants varies between NIH institutes. SuRE grants' success rates in the program's first year (2022-2023) were 44% and 48% for SuRE and SuRE-First grants, respectively. It is not known whether this success rate will change in future years.

**53. What are examples that the SuRE program helps to build infrastructure?**

Building institutional infrastructure is part of the Resource Center mission, funded through the U24 portion of the SuRE program, which includes:

- Administer a competitive seed grant program to help support and strengthen an Office of Sponsored Projects (OSP) or equivalent.
- Conduct outreach to SuRE-eligible institutions to provide information on institutional eligibility, grant submission process, and grants management.
- Disseminate information about the SuRE R16 NOFOs to a geographically and demographically balanced pool of eligible faculty investigators.
- Provide training to faculty investigators in preparing SuRE and other research grant applications.
- Provide professional training to OSP staff at SuRE-eligible institutions.
- Organize biennial SuRE Program Conferences for faculty, students, and research administration staff to facilitate scientific exchange, collaboration, and career development.



General *continued*

**54. It looks like the SuRE U24 is expired — will it be re-released?**

The SuRE U24 was likely a one-time request, with the next call occurring in 2027.

**55. A primary Aim of the R16 program is to reinforce research infrastructure and Office of Sponsored Projects (OSP) at institutions that have limited NIH funding and serve underrepresented students, including Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs). How do you recommend addressing this mission in an R16 SuRE or SuRE-First application?**

While building infrastructure is one Aim of the SuRE program, that initiative is managed exclusively through the SuRE Resource Center, not the R16 application process. The R16, like all R-series programs, should focus on the research proposal.

The only information regarding infrastructure required by the R16 grant is the Strategic Plan for Building Research Capacity and Research Excellence Letter. This letter should come from the Provost, the President, the Vice-President for Research, or an equivalent senior institutional official and describe the strategic plan for developing research capacity and research excellence. The letter should address the vision and commitment to building and sustaining an environment that enables and rewards research and how this research will support the institution's educational mission.

**56. How do you handle obtaining eRA Commons accounts for non-university external collaborators?**

All personnel on R16 applications will need an eRA Commons account. If they are external, it is best to work with the Signing Official within their institution to address this need. Institutions can only create Commons accounts for their employees.

Also, [see this article](#) for an overview of obtaining a Commons account for key personnel not affiliated with an academic institution.

**57. Is a PrePrint an allowable publication?**

Preprints are allowed in the NIH grant application's References and Biosketch sections. See details [at this NIH link](#). These should include the DOI number; one preprint server that is commonly used is [bioRxiv](#). Example: Bar DZ, Atkatsch K, Tavaréz U, Erdos MR, Gruenbaum Y, Collins FS. Biotinylation by antibody recognition — A novel method for proximity labeling. *BioRxiv* 069187 [Preprint]. August 11, 2016 [cited 2017 January 12]. Available from: <https://doi.org/10.1101/069187>.

**58. Resubmit as an A1 application vs. submit as a new application. How much change should one consider for submitting as a new proposal? For instance, is changing the title or Specific Aims regarded as a new proposal?**

The nuances of reviewer comments on the Summary Statement of the initial application will be an important factor in making the decision. The PI should contact the Program Officer to discuss their options. The SuRE Resource Center staff can also offer advice.

Altering the title would not be a sufficient change. Instead, reworking the Aims may be needed for a new submission. Suppose a grant is not funded after a first submission and a resubmission. In that case, you'll likely need to develop a new research direction or make substantive changes to be competitive for funding.

General continued

**59. Do the standard deadlines for R 16 grant applications (May 26 for SuRE, September 28 for SuRE-First) pertain to HIV proposals?**

No. For proposals tied to HIV/AIDS research, please follow NIH's standard due dates for AIDS-related submissions.

**60. Is there a strategic benefit to applying for any amount of time other than four years of funding?**

You should request the amount of time to do the proposed work, and we strongly recommend requesting the maximum number of years unless there is a compelling reason to ask for less. Requesting fewer years is not going to increase the likelihood of funding.

**61. Are there formal or informal guidelines about the percentage of effort a Principal Investigator (PI) can or should request?**

SuRE-first requires that faculty commit six person months per year, some of which can be summer salary. For other grants, such as SuRE or R15, the PI may decide how much effort to put on the grant. This effort should align with how much time is required to complete the project. However, certain grants have limited funding (especially R16 and R15), so you don't want salary support to consume too much of the Budget. Generally, 10-25% is reasonable for an R15, R16, or R21.

**62. Are human cancer cell lines considered human subjects?**

Established cell lines are not considered human subjects. However, the answer is yes if you get primary cells from a person. Please work with your Institutional Review Board (IRB) to confirm, given your specific circumstances. [Visit this NIH page](#) for more information.

**63. How is the student progress monitored in the grant, and is it a mark for renewal?**

An NIH grant requires an annual report called the Research Performance Progress Report (RPPR). SuRE grants will specifically need to address student involvement. Evidence of their significant role can be provided through publications (first-author is better than co-author), meeting abstracts, attendance/presentations at regional and national meetings, other competitive grants the student might have received, post-graduation paths (graduate school, professional school, a job in a STEM field, etc.).

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